GOETHE

CALVIN THOMAS

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GOETHE

BY CALVIN THOMAS

LATE GEBHARD PROFESSOR OF THE GERMANIC
LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES,
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

NEW EDITION WITH A FOREWORD BY
ROBERT HERNDON FIFE

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PREFACE

EVERY scholar has his own Dante, his own Shakspere, his own Goethe. This book presents *my* Goethe as I see him after nearly forty years of university teaching during which he has never been long out of my thoughts. I came to him as an undergraduate by way of Carlyle, and it was largely the spell of Goethe's great name that made me, in the fulness of time, a professional student of German literature. I am conscious of owing more to him than to any other writer of books. True, the halo that he used to wear in my mind's eye has grown a little dimmer in the lapse of years, but his human features have come out the more clearly. I like him the better for that.

But this is not the work of a hierophant or a panegyrist. I have not been concerned to write Goethe up or down or to quarrel with other men's opinions about him. It has seemed to me best to leave all that in the limbo of large tolerance where he himself left it in the metrical squib which I quote on page 257. Nor have I dreamed of adding anything to the vast tale of available information relating to the externalities of his life. That is now possible only in the domain of the infinitesimal, and there are workers enough in that vineyard.

What I *have* tried to do is to portray him faithfully in those larger aspects of his mind and art and life-work that make him so uniquely interesting. Not how he

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walked and dressed and flirted, or 'cleared his throat and spat,' but how he felt and thought and wrought and reacted to the total push of existence—is the theme I have kept in view.

The first part of the volume consists of a short biography which I hope may serve academic and other folk as a readable and trustworthy introduction to the study of Goethe's artistic and intellectual achievement. Here I have tried to pick my way between too little and too much; between the jejuneness of a mere sketch and the cloying plenitude of details that are found in the longer biographies. I have endeavored to write as objectively as possible, taking care to see things just as they really were and never to let personal bias of any kind distort the image. The pronoun I does not occur in this portion of the volume.

In the second part, on the other hand, I relax the reins for my ego, since it was of set purpose *my* Goethe and no one else's that was to be bodied forth. Of course I think it nearer to the truth than other men's—such is human vanity—but I will not labor the point. Probably some good judges will object to my perspective and my lights and shades, and urge that more of this and less of that would have been better. Be it so. I will only say that my 'studies and appreciations' deal with what seem to me the larger and more memorable aspects of Goethe's life-work.

Such a scheme as that here adopted inevitably entails some repetition. I have tried to keep that evil within tolerable and inconspicuous limits, and also to avoid repeating—it was not always easy—what I have written about Goethe in other books. A few sentences and some

metrical translations in Chapter IX have been taken over from an essay entitled 'Goethe and the Conduct of Life,' which was published many years ago and has long been out of print. A portion of Chapter X appeared some time ago in the *Open Court* under the title of 'Goethe and the Development Hypothesis' and is here reprinted by permission.

Finally, I indulge the hope that most readers will thank me for not troubling them with many foot-notes. Those who wish to know the source of my numerous citations are respectfully referred to the Appendix.

CALVIN THOMAS.

New York, May, 1917.

FOREWORD

Robert Herndon Fife

The republication of Professor Thomas' work on Goethe is encouraging evidence of a revival of interest in German literature in this country. It is at the same time proof of the enduring vitality of one of America's greatest teachers of modern literature. The book appeared in the year in which this country joined the war against Germany, and the rising tide of violence and hatred that followed drowned out the serene tones of literary scholarship. At a time when the sound judgment of so many scholars of repute on both sides of the Atlantic toppled over in a welter of hatred and abuse, it was scarcely to be expected that the "sweet reasonableness" which marked the author's mental attitude and style would find a wide hearing. In spite of all this, however, the book has gradually made its way, and it is convincing testimony to its worth that it has won the right to republication in the course of so inhospitable a decade.

Upon those who read and reread them, the chapters that follow make an unusual impression of maturity and power. Published two years before the author's death, the work drew on a life-time of occupation with the greatest and richest soul in modern literature. For Goethe was Thomas' life-work. It was Goethe, he declared, who changed him from a Grecian to a Germanist.

His first scholarly paper before the Modern Language Association of America dealt with *Faust,* and for a generation thereafter what Hermann Grimm styled the "science called Goethe" was his major study; from it he drew his greatest contributions to literary scholarship. Inquiry into the poet's ethical ideas and prolonged studies in *Tasso* led the way to the *Faust* edition, which remains, at the end of three decades, the most significant interpretation of a German literary work which American scholarship has produced. Firmly grounded on the sources, clear and painstaking in presentation, it was, above all, marked by the application of sound American common sense, which swept away as well the subtle hypotheses of the Kuno Fischers as the luxuriant pedantry of the Düntzers, and brought conviction to the reader that the poet's full meaning and intent lay clear even in the profound philosophy of the dialogue between Faust and Mephistopheles and in the extravagant fooleries of the mask in the Second Part. In the twenty years which intervened between the appearance of the Second Part of *Faust* and the volume on Goethe, in university and other lectures, and in occasional papers, the author occupied himself unceasingly with the great German, who was his constant companion through the ripening experience of life.

The present work is the harvest of those years. Wisely Thomas decided not to add another to the great biographies in German and in English which tell with wearying detail so much that is inconsequential in the poet's life, but to put *his* Goethe before the reader, who need not be a specialist in German literature, or indeed in any literature, in order to be able to appreciate the charm of the great soul who can always lift us on the

wings of beauty into an atmosphere of god-like serenity and wisdom. Thomas must have felt in the midst of the war-torn years, when so much that had been built with "aching hands and bleeding feet" by interpreters and students of German literature in America came tumbling about their ears, that men had a peculiar need of knowing Goethe and of learning from him to recognize in the course of history the majestic unfolding of nature's eternal processes. In the First Part of his book he tells clearly and briefly the well-known story of Goethe's life as it appeared to him; in the Second Part he analyzes the poet's genius from the standpoint of dominant ideas and artistry. He closes, as was inevitable, with the work in which the poet registers the experiences of a life-time, *Faust*. I say inevitable, since it was in accord with the eternal fitness of things that this great poem, which formed the subject of Thomas' earliest and of his most enduring studies, should also be his latest theme.

Thomas' *Goethe* is the effort of one who had been a life-long student of the Weimar *Altmeister* to formulate the poet and his work in terms which every intelligent person could comprehend. The author does not bring his hero before us as the superman which so many German biographers have made of him. In his book Goethe is neither glorified nor sentimentalised. He is not presented as a titanic poet of primitive urges from which the veil is to be timorously drawn aside, or as a problem to be solved with the aid of formulas of psychoanalysis and patho-analysis, but he moves on the background of his time, from his sunny childhood in Frankfort to the last decade of his life in Weimar, as naturally among the bright men and women of his circle of friends and the brighter figures of his own dramas and novels and lyrical

poems as the hero of a contemporary play. In this narrative part the author unwinds with dexterous and unhesitating hand the story of the poet's life and leaves it free to work its charm unencumbered by subtle hypotheses or ponderous digressions.

The biography reveals the poet to us *in extenso:* the Second Part studies Goethe's genius intensively, lighting up in succession the various facets of his character as philosopher, as religious personality, and as literary artist and critic. Here Thomas' simple exposition offers guidance to the beginner as well as help to the mature student. He approaches the problem of genius as one who is seeking to throw light on the dark and obscure rather than to discover new mysteries and heighten obscurity. The analysis of the poet's basic philosophical conceptions, the search for his ideas of evolution, and the theory, very interestingly set forth, that Goethe's mature conception of the poet's mission is that he shall discover harmony in the jangling chords of existence, bear the marks of the clear-sighted rationalist who never permits enthusiasm for his hero to impair his critical faculties or muddy the clarity of his presentation.

Something indeed of the Goethean harmony pervades the books. Something also of that Goethean optimism which shows itself in the final monologues of Faust and in the serene philosophy of the *West-eastern Divan,* an optimism that looks on life's pains and struggles as the soul's opportunity and greets each new experience as a challenge to new action. The reappearance of Thomas' *Goethe* is a fitting accompaniment to the rising interest in the study of the poet in America which is already showing itself as a prelude to the celebration of the anniversary of his death in 1932.

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PART FIRST

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER I

LINEAGE AND BOYHOOD

WHAT is known of Goethe's paternal ancestry begins about the middle of the seventeenth century with a certain Hans Christian Goethe, a blacksmith by trade, who was then living at the village of Artern some thirty miles north of Weimar. A son of his named Friedrich Georg was bred to the tailor's calling and settled in Frankfort-on-the-Main, where he married the daughter of a tailor and acquired the rights of citizenship. His business prospered and by 1704 he was listed for taxation in the richest class of Frankfort burghers, those having property to the amount of fifteen thousand gulden. A second marriage with a well-to-do widow named Cornelia Schelhorn still further increased the thrifty tailor's estate and made him landlord of the Weidenhof Inn. One of the children of this pair was Johann Caspar Goethe, the poet's father. He was born in 1710.

The ambitious parents decided to give their son a lawyer's education, which would make him a peer of the best in self-governing Frankfort and perhaps open the way to some honorable position in the service of the city. So Johann Caspar prepared for the university, heard lectures at Leipsic and Giessen, studied the practice of the imperial chamber of justice at Wetzlar, and in 1738 took his degree. Then he traveled in foreign

countries, sojourning some time in Italy and bringing home a precious little store of Italian books, prints, and memories, which were henceforth to light up his humdrum life with a gleam of poetry. For his hopes of a public career came to naught, leaving him with nothing in particular to do and a grievance against the unappreciative city fathers. To assert his dignity and soothe his wounded pride he procured from the imperial chancelry the title of Councilor. This was in 1742. For some years more he lived on with his aged mother in the roomy house on the Hirschgraben, and then came the happy thought—so posterity must forever regard it—of marrying Catherine Elisabeth Textor.

The Frankfort Textors were of ancient and high respectability won by learning and public service. Back in the sixteenth century we hear of a certain Georg Weber, an official in the service of the Count of Hohenlohe, who transmitted his name in the Latinized form of Textor to a son called Wolfgang. From him there is an unbroken line of lawyer-magistrates running down to Johann Wolfgang Textor, born in 1693. This is the grandfather of whom Goethe writes so engagingly in his autobiography—the boy Wolfgang's first symbol of human greatness. Called in the prime of life to a seat in the Frankfort council, he served the city well and in 1747 became its chief magistrate. He had four daughters, of whom Catherine Elisabeth, born in 1731, was the eldest. She was thus some twenty years younger than Councilor Goethe, to whom she was married in 1748. It was not a romantic alliance. The tailor's son wished to strengthen his social position, the poor patrician to see his daughter well provided for.

The first child of these parents, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, destined to become the most illustrious of German writers, was born on the 28th of August, 1749.

In this prosaic lineage of lawyers and workingmen there is little forewarning of the genius that was to produce 'Faust.' We do find, it is true, some traits of the coming man, but it is hardly worth while to dwell on any remote and elusive factors. In his mother, certainly, the newcomer was highly blest. Frau Aja, as they afterwards called her, was a cheery person, a blithe and orderly housekeeper, a charming letter-writer, imaginative, religious without thinking much of the proofs or the sanctions, and quickly responsive to another's joy or sorrow. She once said of herself:

> It is God's grace to me that no human soul, of whatever station, age or sex, ever went away from me displeased. As is felt by old and young, I am very fond of people. I go about the world without pretense, and that suits everybody. I do not bemoralize anyone and I always try to spy out the good side, leaving the bad to Him who created men and best knows how to smoothe off the sharp corners.

The gift on which she especially prided herself was her story-telling. 'Write books?' she once said; 'no, I can not do that, but in telling over what others have written I can beat them all.' In her early married life she had much to bear in the loss of several children and in the growing acerbity of her husband; yet she always retained a certain childlike directness and impulsiveness. In her letters, even those written in her later years, she appears as one whose heart is quite untouched by time.

The father was a being of a different kind. Rigid and formal in his ways, fussy and easily ruffled, he was

much given to arranging and inspecting his possessions both material and spiritual. After his marriage he led a laboriously idle life at Frankfort, his chief occupations being the supervision of domestic affairs, the teaching of his children, and the pursuit of various little hobbies. He had a bent for puttering and but little of his son's passion for conquering new realms of the spirit. Being so much older than his wife and of a very different temperament, he could sympathize but little with her vivacious light-heartedness; he played the schoolmaster with her as with the children. He was a martinet for discipline, set great store by the formalities, and held it a fault to show tenderness. Six children in all were born to the pair, but none reached maturity except Wolfgang and a sister, Cornelia, born in 1750.

There are some well-known verses of Goethe in which he derives his serious bent from his father, his joyous temperament from his mother. It will be seen as we go on that during approximately the first third of his life—the period covered by his autobiography—the maternal strain was dominant; not, however, as an equable 'gayety' (*Frohnatur*), but in the form of an extreme nervous instability such as very often goes with imaginative genius of a high order. Ordinarily, in his youth, he was cheerful and companionable; men and women alike were strongly drawn to him. But there were also times of depression, hypochondria, disgust with life. The melancholia of adolescence hit him very hard, and tension of feeling sometimes brought him near to the danger-point. He knew all moods, his capacity for experience was boundless. In the course of time he became more like his father—sedate, methodical, circumspect. But

from boyhood to old age his two ruling proclivities were the passion for artistic creation and the desire to make the most of life.

In the main Goethe's childhood was a pleasant unfolding of natural aptitudes in an atmosphere of comfort and refinement. Neither early nor late is there any tale to tell of toughening struggle with poverty or any other external adversity; so it seems that Mother Nature *can* do without that, if she will, when she sets out to fashion a poet by her largest pattern. Still, his good fortune has been a little too much dwelt on and not always painted in colors exactly true to life. One should by no means imagine him at Frankfort as lapped in luxury and unacquainted with the bitter tonics of boyish experience. While the family belonged to the patrician class by virtue of the mother's connections, this class itself was only the intellectual aristocracy of a small town of some thirty thousand inhabitants none of whom were very rich. As for Councilor Goethe, albeit he liked to surround himself with the tokens of culture and opulence, he was at bottom of a decidedly frugal mind. There was never the least danger of his spoiling his children by overindulgence.

And so Wolfgang escaped the corrosive power of riches and never suffered because of his advantages. To the end of his days he remained quite indifferent to the seductions of luxury. As a child he did his tasks easily and was soon left much to himself. What there was to see in quaint old Frankfort he saw with a boy's eager curiosity. He explored the town, with its bustling fair, its wonderful stone bridge, and its Römer with reminders of Holy Roman pomp. In one way and another he was

a good deal in contact with life in the rough. He learned to love the racy dialect of the plain people. He investigated the ghetto, became acquainted with some of its denizens, and learned a bit of their lingo. He came more or less into relations with boys less daintily bred than himself.

To what extent the mind and art of the coming poet were shaped by these early Frankfort impressions it is hard to say. Some of his later imaginative writings, notably 'Faust,' contain reminiscences of the town, but that fact does not signify much. Fortunately nascent genius does not depend very much on local environment, but thrives in any place. What it finds turns out to be what it needs. In Frankfort there were no very fine buildings, no remarkable pictures or sculptures to be seen; but there were mementoes of a long and notable past, and there were quaint and curious customs, especially in connection with the coronation of an emperor. These fed the boy's imagination and quickened his love of picturesque symbolism. Public life was tame. There was no prince, no court, no great loyalty to the empire. To be sure, the burghers were a little proud of their position in the imperial fabric and did their part handsomely when an emperor was to be crowned. At heart, however, they did not care much for the empire and thought far more of their privileges than of their duties. Public law and custom were still determined to a lamentable degree by the ossified prejudice of caste and guild. Under such conditions there was little enough to stimulate a boy's love of country or to quicken in him the sentiment of political loyalty. That peculiar development of the herd-instinct that we call patriotism never came natural

to Goethe and played a very small part in his early development.

The Seven Years' War brought its own peculiar schooling. With boyhood's usual love of a good fighter Wolfgang took sides with his father in favor of the Prussian king, while the mother and her family sympathized more with the Austrians. There were hot disputes wherein the boy was compelled to hear his hero vilified by persons whom it was his duty to revere for their wisdom. This gave rise to unruly thoughts about human justice, even as the Lisbon earthquake had stirred up the question of divine justice. Thus the coming dramatist got a lesson on the two-sidedness of questions, and the idols of authority were shattered before his eyes.

And then came, in 1759, the forcible occupation of Frankfort by a French army of seven thousand men under the Prince de Soubise and the billeting of the Comte de Thoranc in the Goethe house, which had lately been enlarged and remodeled into a somewhat pretentious mansion. The Comte de Thoranc—Goethe calls him Thorane—was a suave and chivalrous aristocrat from Provence. His military rank was that of royal lieutenant of infantry, and it fell to him during the French occupation of Frankfort to act as umpire and arbiter in matters of dispute between the citizens and their unwelcome guests. Being a man of artistic tastes he took occasion to employ local artists to paint pictures for his château in France. It was through his influence that a company of players came over from Metz and set up a French theater. The various operations of the Comte de Thoranc filled the house with a bustle of litigants, visitors, artists, and players, who were a terrible trial to Councilor Goethe,

with his strong Prussian sympathies and his temperamental aversion to being disturbed in his routine. To the boy Wolfgang, however, it was all very entertaining and brought a world of new impressions. He watched the artists at their work, overheard and took part in their discussions, and came to regard himself as a bit of a connoisseur in pictures.

In another way, too, he turned the presence of the soldiers to good account. For the sake of his French he was permitted to attend the theater. At first, of course, he did not understand the language; but he had the good fortune to make friends with a French boy, De Rosne, the son of one of the actresses, who became his playmate and soon made him at home both before and behind the scenes. In a short time he had picked up a good knowledge of French and was actually engaged in writing a French play and debating the far-famed unities with his comrade from over the Rhine. As the little Frenchman talked with sapient assurance on the subject Wolfgang procured a copy of Corneille's essay and tried to post himself on the doctrine; but he soon came to the conclusion that the plays were better than the recipe for making them. He heard metrical comedies of Destouches, Marivaux, and La Chaussée, and also various tragedies, among which, half a century later, he remembered the 'Hypermnestra' of Lemierre most vividly. What he had seen of Molière at this early date had entirely faded from his memory, tho he could recall having read him with interest. He also read Racine.

So it appears that by the time he was twelve years old Wolfgang was well grounded not only in the language but in the poetic drama of the people to which, for a

century and a half, the Germans had looked up as to the source of all light and authority in matters literary. His ideas of the stage and of the dramatic art had come to him by way of France. For years to come he wrote a good part of his letters in French and often essayed French verses. To perfect himself in that language became one of his fixed aspirations. After a while his mind underwent a revulsion against French art in all its forms, but this was only a passing phase of youthful radicalism. The mature Goethe, the friend of clearness, never forgot his debt to the French genius.

It was the unalterable purpose of Councilor Goethe that his son should study law at a university, become familiar with the practice at one of the imperial chambers of justice, travel abroad, especially in Italy, and then return to Frankfort and garner his appropriate reward of civic honor. The schooling that the son received in pursuance of this plan was irregular and unprofessional but liberally conceived. He was not sent to school save for a short time while the family residence was being rebuilt, but instructed at home—partly by his father. He read copiously in Latin authors and was especially drawn to the ' Metamorphoses ' of Ovid. By overhearing his sister's lessons he picked up a smattering of Italian. He also took lessons in English and made such progress that on going to the university he was able to write gossipy English letters—letters that are often amusingly bookish and unidiomatic but sprightly and clever nevertheless. He even undertook to poetize in English and boasted to his sister of ' English verses that a stone would weep.' Greek was not seriously studied, tho we hear of attempts to construe the Greek Testament. At one time he

plunged boldly into Hebrew, being led thereto by his interest in the book of books.

Aside from these preponderating linguistic studies Goethe's preparatory schooling was of little account. Natural science, which was to claim so much of his attention in after years, did not then exist as a serious discipline for the youthful mind. In mathematics he hardly got beyond the rudiments of arithmetic and geometry, which may fairly be called a misfortune for the future adversary of Sir Isaac Newton. While yet a mere boy he was required by his strenuous father to grapple with the Corpus Juris and the Institutes of Roman Law. The result was a providential disgust for law-studies and a strengthened resolution to be a poet.

By nature, of course, Goethe was a 'maker.' In early childhood the poetic impulse manifested itself as a fondness for imaginative constructions of different kinds. His favorite diversions were the marionette theater, the inventing and acting of little plays, and listening to his mother's fairy-tales, from which it was but a step to more or less elaborate compositions of his own. In one of Frau Aja's letters there is a charming description of the story-telling ardors of mother and son:

> There I would sit and he would all but devour me with his big black eyes; and if anything went wrong with one of his favorites I could see him bite his lips to keep back the tears, while the angry veins would stand out on his forehead. Sometimes he would interrupt before I had reached my turning-point and say: 'Now, mother, that confounded tailor isn't going to get the princess, is he, even if he does kill the giant?' And if ever I made a halt and postponed the catastrophe until the next evening I could be sure that by that time he would have everything straightened out; and so my imagination, when

it no longer sufficed, was often replaced by his. And then, the next evening, when I would guide the threads of fate according to his indication and say, 'You guessed it,' he would be all on fire and one could see his little heart beat under his neckcloth.

When he had invented a story he would tell it to his playmates, making himself the hero of wonderful adventures and so mixing up the natural and plausible with the fabulous as to beguile his rapt listeners into believing that it was true. A specimen of these juvenile tales entitled the 'New Paris' is given in the second book of 'Poetry and Truth,' where it is introduced by a remark to the effect that in this bent for mystification we may recognize the presumption of the poet, who utters the most improbable things and demands that we believe them. Unfortunately the tale is in the unmistakable style of its author's later years, which detracts somewhat from its biographic value. At the most it only shows us the kind of dream-world in which his boyish imagination loved to play. It is not the dream-world of German folklore but a kind of juvenile adaptation of Ovid. Mercury visits the dreaming Wolfgang and gives him three wonderful apples, requesting him to bestow them on the three handsomest boys in town, who by their aid will find suitable wives. As the dreamer holds them in his hand they change into three lovely little goddesses who float away in the air, leaving a Liliputian nymph dancing on his finger-tips. And so on.

In the course of this tale its hero calls himself 'darling of the gods.' Today it seems as if the gods might have done better for their darling than to feed his childish imagination on such poor exotic fruit. But the gods have their own way of providing nourishment for imagi-

native boyhood. In this case they relied largely on Luther's bible. But there were also the so-called folk-books—prose tales which had come down from late-medieval times and were still in favor with the plain people. They were not products of conscious literary art but gems in the rough which had acquired some polish by much rolling over the sands of time. Two of them in particular, 'Doctor Faust' and the 'Wandering Jew,' etched themselves indelibly on the boy's mind.

And then there was Klopstock. An amusing passage of 'Poetry and Truth' tells how the man with the curious name (one might translate it Knockstick) brought trouble into the Goethe household. The austere Councilor was a man of literary bent but no lover of innovation. According to his light poetry was a matter of good common sense properly set forth in regular rime with more or less of rhetorical point. It was not for him, therefore, to lose his equanimity over the opening cantos of the 'Messiah' when they were smuggled into the house as devotional literature by a pious friend of the family. But Wolfgang and Cornelia liked the high-sounding verses hugely and memorized long passages which they declaimed at each other for the sheer fun of the thing. This went on for a while clandestinely with the mother's connivance. Then, one Saturday evening, as paterfamilias was being shaved, the barber heard Cornelia reciting in a stage whisper from behind the stove. She was doing the heart-rending appeal of the devil Adramalech to Satan:

Monster, I worship thee. Listen, thou wretched demon of darkness,
Help me who suffer the pain of everlasting perdition.

The barber became so excited that he upset his lather on his customer's shirt-front, thus furnishing evidence enough that Klopstock was an impostor. 'Thus,' says Goethe in relating the incident many years later, 'do children and the common people convert the great and memorable into sport, even into farce; and indeed how else could they endure it?'

It does not appear that this juvenile interest in Klopstock led to any poetic attempts in the Klopstockian style. The young twig was never bent in that direction as happened in the case of young Schiller a few years later. It is true that the poem 'Christ's Descent into Hell,' the first of Goethe's poetic productions to find its way into print, sounds here and there reminiscent of the 'Messiah'; but on the other hand its rimed stanzas are not at all in the Klopstockian vein. Written by request it is what is quite rightly called an 'effort' and signifies nothing more than its author's early mastery of the technic of verse-making in the ambitious conventional style. And the same may be said of the other juvenilia that have chanced to be preserved. Partly from his own bent and partly in pursuance of his father's educational plan, the boy did a great deal of imaginative writing both in prose and in verse. He acquired local renown as an occasional poet and came to think of himself—so it appears from a subsequent letter to his sister—as a 'thunderer.' Large literary plans flitted before his mind and his ambition was boundless. He began a pious biblical romance called 'Joseph.' We hear also of a tragedy 'Belshazzar,' of a polyglot novel in six languages, of a pastoral 'Amine,' and of other projects whereof nothing has survived.

When he was fourteen years old his facility in verse-making brought him to grief. He fell in with a bevy of young folks, belonging to the so-called lower classes, who induced him to perpetrate a hoax on one of their number by inditing imaginary love-letters. The joke succeeded and presently he was receiving orders for hymeneal and obituary verses which he executed with dispatch. The revenue so obtained was spent in mild conviviality with the new friends, one of whom was the girl he calls Gretchen. She was several years older than he, received his boyish devotion with discreet maidenly reserve, and gave him good sisterly advice. Presently one of the youngsters whom he had innocently recommended to his grandfather for a clerkship committed a forgery. There was an exposure and great chagrin befel the respectable Goethe household when its clever scion was discovered to have been keeping company with lawbreakers. The lad himself suffered terribly until they told him that Gretchen had been fully exonerated by the magistrate, but had stated formally in writing that she had always looked on him as a child. That was the beginning of a cure which proceeded rapidly under the ministrations of a wise tutor.

In after life the love-affairs of fourteen are apt to appear negligible. That the author of 'Poetry and Truth' devoted so much space to this one was probably due to a feeling on his part that it had really counted for something in his early development. A boy's idealizing love, which had stirred only what was best in his nature, had ended in an agony of pain and mortification. The experience had a ripening effect. What kind of a world was this in which such things could happen? And

what were the sources of consolation? His tutor tried to interest him in philosophy but with little success. Somehow it did not seem to fit the case. But there *was* a comforter—one to whom in after years he often resorted in time of trouble. We read in 'Poetry and Truth' that he one day drew his tutor to a secluded spot in the woods near Frankfort. The elderly friend made an erudite remark to the effect that the ancient Germans were fond of communing with the mystic divinity of the forest. Whereupon the boy exclaimed ardently, as reported in the style of a later time:

> Oh, why does not this precious spot lie in the depths of the wilderness? Why may we not hedge it in that we may consecrate it and ourselves and separate both from the world? Surely there is no more beautiful worship than that for which no symbol is needed; than that which springs from the heart simply by communion with nature.

As the time for Wolfgang's departure for the university drew near, his mind revolted more and more against the course of life that his father had marked out for him. His private wish was to study the old humanities at Göttingen and then prepare for an academic and literary career. But to this his father would not listen for a moment; willy-nilly it was to be Leipsic and the law. The aging Councilor saw with regret that he himself had cut no very imposing figure in the world. He hoped that his son, pursuing a similar course with better gifts and a better start, might rise much higher. The boy listened quietly to this paternal charting of his voyage and did his own thinking. He had begun to tire of leading-strings and indeed of Frankfort as a whole. The strongest attraction of the place was his sister

Cornelia, to whom he had drawn closer since the bitter experience with Gretchen. But what are the ties of home and kin to the lad of sixteen who has begun to hunger after life and to hear the beckoning call of the ' wondrous mother-age '?

CHAPTER II

STUDENT LIFE

WOLFGANG arrived in Leipsic early in October, 1765, and was soon a duly matriculated student of the law.

The Leipsic of that day was of about the same size as Frankfort but less provincial and more pretentious. With the progress of the Reformation it had gradually become the center of the German book-trade and, at least in its own estimation, the intellectual capital of Germany. Its Upper Saxon dialect was now the literary standard, so that authors and publishers looked to Leipsic as the arbiter of correct usage. There was much interest in polite literature. Among the citizens were several rich merchants who set the pace for the social life of the town. Some of them had laid out gardens in the Italian spirit and started collections of art. Naturally enough the inhabitants of the little Paris on the Pleisse regarded themselves as the salt of the German earth—outside their precinct was Boeotia. The burghers prided themselves on their refinement. Living in mute servility under a despotic government in which they had no share, they gave little attention to politics. They followed the fashions of Paris, gossiped in French, and looked on *savoir faire* as the queen of virtues. In Jena or Halle the student might be a rowdy; in Leipsic he was at least supposed to be a gentleman.

In this environment Goethe was destined to spend nearly three years, nominally studying law but in reality browsing along the by-ways of more seductive experience. How he amused himself, and with what effect on his mind, can be read most instructively, no doubt, in the calm retrospect of 'Poetry and Truth,' but with a livelier entertainment in his contemporary letters, which are at first as light-hearted, boyish, and gossipy as one could wish.

The story of his relations to the university can be quickly told. He set out bravely, choosing certain courses in law and others under the faculty of philosophy. The latter were such as he thought would be in the line of his literary ambitions or good for what used to be called general culture. Meaning to be very diligent he grappled vigorously with Latin that he might be able to understand the lectures; and for a little while, presumably, he took notes 'as if the Holy Ghost were dictating.' But the official academic pabulum soon palled upon him. He failed to find an inspiring teacher or an appetizing subject. He already knew to a certain extent what the law professors said, having heard it from his father. How logic and philosophy impressed him can be guessed from Mephisto's persiflage in 'Faust': he had hoped that logic would teach him to weave new thoughts, and he found on trial that it only taught him to unravel the thoughts he already had. Philosophy, as then and there administered, struck him as a matter of big words that no one could understand.

Even the famous Gellert, from whom he had hoped the most, disappointed him. Gellert was just then at the zenith of his peculiar renown. His writings, espe-

cially his fables and poetic tales, were in high repute and were held by many to exhibit the finest flower of moral and esthetic culture. Of poetry as a soul-stirring art Gellert had scarcely an inkling, and he seems to have been in the habit of advising students against it. At least he so advised Goethe, urging instead the importance of a correct and elegant prose. While universally venerated as a benignant and helpful personality, he was clearly not the man to electrify a young genius.

The natural result of all these separate disgusts was a general disgust with academic learning. The knowledge that he was getting did not seem to be worth the bother, there being no wisdom in it, no food for the soul; it was nothing but opinion, taste, tradition, with nowhere any bed-rock of first principles. This reaction is to be attributed partly to the dryness of the lectures, but rather more to that native quality of Goethe's mind which made it impossible for him to assimilate ready-made knowledge. He was not born to thrive on predigested food or to chew the cud of tradition. Hence a severe attack of bookworm's dyspepsia, which went, in the fulness of time, to the making of a poet's immortal poem. For the present, however, the case of young Goethe had little resemblance to the passionate despair and transcendental yearnings of Faust. It was much simpler: the lectures bored him and he cut them.

A more racking trial presently beset him in the temporary collapse of his poetic ambition. With the brave confidence of sixteen he had felt himself called forthwith to great achievement. He worked diligently on his ' Belshazzar,' doing the first four acts in alexandrines and the fifth in blank verse—this last out of regard for

'the Briton,' whom he was beginning to read in Dodd's 'Beauties of Shakspere.' And he essayed other big far-off things. But no one gave him a good word. Whoever was permitted to see a specimen of his work treated it with exasperating levity. Clodius, the recognized official poet of the university, actually laughed at one of his grandiloquent effusions. By the end of the first semester he began to despair of his talent and to feel at times very miserable. At last he decided that he could never be a poet and solemnly burned all his extant productions.

I search myself and can not find
A spark of worth in me,

he sang in a lugubrious English poem entitled 'A Song over the Unconfidence toward Myself.' A part of the English letter in which he inclosed the verses—it was written to Cornelia on May 11, 1766—runs as follows:

Any [a few] words of myself. Sister, I am a foolish boy. Thou knowst it; why should I say it? My soul is changed a little. I am no longer a thunderer as I was at Francfort. I make [poetize] no more; j'enrage. I am as meek! as meek! Hah, thou believest it not! Many time I become a melancholical one. I know not whence it comes. Then I look on every man with a starring [staring] owl-like countenance. Then I go in woods, to streams, I look on the pyed daisies, on the blue violets, I hear the nightingales, the larks, the rooks, and daws, the cuckow; and then a darkness comes down on my soul; a darkness as thik as fogs in the October are.

But this dismal state of mind did not last very long and proved to be a blessing in disguise. For when the sufferer had cured himself by turning his trouble into

rime—his own trouble, not that of Belshazzar or any other remote worthy—it gradually came over him that he might do better in his poetizing if he were to write of the things, however humble, that actually concerned him. At the same time he resolved to aim at greater simplicity and clarity of expression. There should be no more rhetorical soaring into worlds unrealized, nothing but the simple rendering of his own experience. Thus at the age of seventeen he was already preparing for the time when he could say that 'all his works were fragments of a great confession.'

And experience was on the way. In the spring of 1766 he took up his abode in the house of a wine-merchant named Schönkopf, whose wife was a Frankfort woman. There was a pretty daughter Anna Katherine—Käthchen, Annette, Nette—who waited on the table; and she poured wine so delightfully that it went to the new boarder's heart. She too was captivated and ere long there was a delirious love-affair in progress. But its course was short and full of trouble. There came jealousies, quarrels, reconciliations, and fresh quarrels, until Annette's patience gave out. Then her wo-begone lover tried to win her back by acting more reasonably, but found that it was too late. He was obliged to agree that they should see less of each other and call it a case of friendship. For the providentially unhappy ending of this romance the author of 'Poetry and Truth' takes all the blame on himself. And his memory seems not to have erred, for contemporary letters to his friend Behrisch show that the lover of Annette now and then behaved very wildly even for an enamored lad of eighteen. Summing up the case judicially in March, 1768,

after the crisis was over, he wrote to his friend: 'She is an angel and I am a fool.'

This Behrisch was a lank individual, with a bent for cynical drollery, who was then living in Leipsic as tutor to a young nobleman. Tho much older than Goethe he took a fancy to him, became his confidant, and perhaps gave him some of the impressions which were afterwards to crystalize under the name of Mephistopheles. It was Behrisch who undertook, in the summer of 1767, to select some of the best of his young friend's poetic effusions and make a calligraphic copy of them. It was done and the pretty manuscript, adorned with a vignette and duly bound in leather, was entitled 'Annette.' After being lost to mankind for more than a century it came to light in 1895 and was published in the *Deutsche Rundschau*. There are two short tales in prose and about a score of little poems in the fashion of an era that was passing. Some of them have a pastoral setting. We read of enamored shepherds and shepherdesses, of the arts of seduction, of the dangers that beset girls, of the blessedness of innocence preserved. Conventional, imitative, shallow, the poems convey no suggestion of the lyric power that was to come. They tell rather of a youth who would fain pose as an expert in a conventional *ars amandi*.

Another poetic precipitate of the year 1767, tho it was not published until 1806, is the 'Lover's Wayward Humor,' a one-act play in alexandrine verse. The lovelorn shepherd Eridon torments his sweetheart Amine with his peevish jealousy until her life is miserable. Her friend Egle resolves to give him a lesson. She first chides him for his weakness, then assumes a sentimental,

languishing tone, and thus craftily lures him on to the point of giving her a kiss. With this sin on his soul he can no longer cast stones at Amine. Bagatelle as it is, one can still read Goethe's first play with pleasure on account of his clever handling of the alexandrine measure—a form which, like the pastoral fiction itself, had had its day and was about to be discarded along with other things borrowed from France.

In the third year of his residence in Leipsic Goethe became somewhat more studious. While his university lectures still continued to bore him as often as he gave them a chance, he found real inspiration in Oeser's teaching of art. Oeser was an amiable man in the fifties who had lately come over from Dresden to take charge of the Leipsic art school. For years he had enjoyed the friendship of Winckelmann, to whom the prevailing rococo was an abomination. As an antidote he commended the ' noble simplicity and quiet grandeur ' of Greek sculpture. Oeser had imbibed Winckelmann's enthusiasm for Greek simplicity and soon indoctrinated Goethe with it. Nearly all Germans at that time took it for granted that excellence in art, of whatever kind, was a matter of imitating good models; the voice of Herder in remote Riga, pleading for originality, sincerity, and national savor, was only just beginning to be heard. So far as taste is concerned, Oeser was certainly on solid ground in preferring the Greek style to the decadent and meretricious Rocaille, with its profusion of senseless ornament. At the same time he really knew but little about the Greeks and was himself a poor practitioner. The best work left by him lacks vigor of drawing and gives an impression of flabby prettiness that is anything but Greek.

Goethe had long been fond of sketching and much practice had given him a certain facility. Under Oeser's tuition the subject of art opened before him in its wider bearings. He worked faithfully in the drawing-school, and if he did not gain much in technic he got some insight into theories and principles and received sympathetic guidance. He took lessons in etching and spent some time in Dresden worshiping at the shrine of art.

And so he might have drifted along for another year, perhaps, but for a grave illness which befel him. It was caused by a recklessly imprudent way of living—not vice but bad diet and a general disregard of hygiene—whereby he sought to discipline his body for the defects of his character. There is some evidence that in these days he was often moody, morose, and unsociable—a trial and a mystery to his friends. One night in July, 1768, he was awakened by a bad hemorrhage which was at first believed to portend consumption. It looked as if the end were at hand. Under the care of physician and friends he rallied, but so slowly that he decided to go home as soon as his strength should be equal to the journey.

On the 3rd of September the shipwrecked mariner reached home—pale, languid, with sunken cheeks, and with no doctor's degree to glad the paternal heart. A month later he wrote that he was as well as a man could be who was in doubt whether he had consumption. This anxiety continued to haunt him till near the end of the year, when he received final assurance that his lungs were sound and that the seat of his malady was the stomach. Meanwhile, in December, he had undergone a second attack of illness with sufferings so acute that his life was

despaired of. When he began to recover from this he was again prostrated. And so he spent the winter and spring as an invalid prisoner. Even after that his convalescence was slow and tedious; so that it was not until April, 1770, that he felt well enough to resume his university career.

For the young Goethe, just passing from the green to the ripe stage of glorious youth, this year and a half of seclusion brought its own peculiar gain. It was devoted to the practice of drawing, to religious meditation and discussion, to abstruse studies in alchemy and magic, and latterly to literary work. There was time for that revaluation of values which comes of itself under the menace of impending death. There was time also for that inward digestion of experience which constitutes the substance of spiritual progress. So one can understand the words of a letter of December 30, 1768: 'Misfortune is good too. In my illness I have learned much that I could otherwise never have learned in my life.' A few weeks later he wrote thus in the course of a long letter to Friederike Oeser:

> My present mode of life is devoted to philosophy. Shut in, alone, with circle, paper, pen and ink, and two books, for my entire outfit! And in this simple way I often get further in the knowledge of truth than others with their library science. A great scholar is rarely a great philosopher, and he who laboriously turns the leaves of many books despises the easy, simple book of Nature. And yet nothing is true but what is simple.

Here we see the first embryonic stage of the Faust situation: a lonely scholar disgusted with book-learning and teased by the idea that there is somewhere, if one

could only find it, a direct path to intuitive, joy-giving knowledge.

Among the intimate friends of the household was the saintly Fräulein von Klettenberg, a cousin of Frau Goethe and the leading spirit in a local pietistic cotery of the Herrnhuter connection. She seems to have been one of those gentle and devout natures for whom religion is the only reality; and her religion took the form of a calm, imperturbable trust in a near personal Savior. It is her character which is more or less reflected in the 'beautiful soul' of 'Wilhelm Meister.' She interested herself deeply in Goethe's spiritual welfare and would have had him make his peace with God in her way. She was unable to produce a conviction of sin—he felt that the account between him and his Maker was fairly even—but her serenity of mind, as of one fortified against all the ills that flesh is heir to, seemed to him altogether enviable. So he yielded to her persuasions and was converted—for a season—to the pietistic faith. He attended the conventicle, partook in the communion service, and learned to use the dialect of the very devout. Ere long, when he had emerged from his seclusion, he drifted away from these associations, but an indelible impression had been made on his character. Henceforth it was impossible for him to think otherwise than kindly of genuine religious feeling. The mystic in him had been deeply stirred and he remained to the end of his days, even while men were calling him a pagan, deeply sensitive to, tho not at all an exemplar of, what is called the beauty of holiness.

The occult studies were taken up at the instigation of the family doctor, who was a member of the pietistic

circle and also a believer in alchemy. He made much ado about a certain powder that he had prepared, not without moral ingredients, but dared not use for fear of the law. Their curiosity excited by the doctor's talk, mother and son and the saintly Fräulein took up the study of Welling's 'Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum,' that they might learn how to make the wonderful panacea. Welling's book was then quite new, tho its pedigree, as Goethe observes, could be traced back to Neo-Platonism. It is a dreary, inconsecutive hodge-podge of magic, astrology, alchemy, cabalism, and spiritism, all set forth with pious unction and fortified with numerous quotations from scripture. The study of Welling had already begun when one day the patient became alarmingly worse. The frightened mother declared that now if ever was the time for the powder. It was administered and the sufferer got better. This naturally quickened the trio's interest in their cabalistic chemistry. Branching out from Welling, Goethe read the authors cited by him, and when warm weather came he set up a laboratory in the attic and undertook to perform the experiments set forth in the books.

In later years he thought he had got some good from these pursuits: if he had not discovered the philosopher's stone he had at least found out what certain substances looked like. But the profit, such as it was, inured to the poet of 'Faust' rather than to the man of science, who paid little attention to chemistry even after Lavoisier had laid the new foundations. It was wretched stuff that he read—perhaps the very craziest chapter in the history of European thought—but out of it he somehow distilled Faust's wonderful dream of an ecstatic

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spirit-life to be attained by the aid of natural magic. But he also read other and saner books than those of the alchemists. He took up Gottfried Arnold's bulky 'History of the Church and of Heresy' and was moved by it to a kindly feeling for some of the great heretics. The idea came home to him that they were not bad men and false teachers, but good men of superior courage and insight. The type of the misunderstood searcher after truth began to haunt his imagination and to blend with that of the daring votary of natural magic.

As his health improved his literary browsing took a wide range from muddy old speculation to the newest thing out. We have his 'Ephemerides,' a sort of note-book or diary of reading, begun in January, 1770. It consists of book-titles and quotations, with comments of his own in German, French, and Latin. Never did convalescent poet feed on stranger food. Along with cryptic medical prescriptions and curious maunderings of Paracelsus we find excerpts from Lucan, Quintilian, Cicero, Livy, Pliny the Elder, and other Roman writers. Here is an extract from Ayrer's 'Processus Juris,' wherein Lucifer complains of his wrongs at the hands of Christ; there a note from a new work on the distinction between the fable and the Märchen; a string of satirical verses from Voltaire; jottings from the latest *Mercure de France;* a description of an aurora borealis; quasi-scientific notes on spiders; quotations from Rousseau, Shakspere, and Lessing; an extended analysis of Mendelssohn's 'Phaedo'; a defense of Giordano Bruno against Bayle's Dictionary. And so on in endless variety.

The literary work above referred to consisted in bringing out a small collection of lyric poems and complet-

ing a second play in alexandrines, the ' Fellow-Culprits.' The former, entitled simply ' New Songs,' was published anonymously, with music by a Leipsic friend named Breitkopf, in the autumn of 1769. There were twenty of them in all. They had mostly been lived in Leipsic and naturally have much the same savor as the 'Annette' poems spoken of above. But they are better technically and more mature on the intellectual side. Their author thought them artless and likened them to wild flowers; but as one reads them now they seem begotten of critical reflection rather than of spontaneous feeling. The young lyrist needed the schooling of the folk-song.

The ' Fellow-Culprits ' is a sort of rogue's comedy in respectable middle-class society. We have a shabby quartet consisting of an inquisitive inn-keeper, his worthless son-in-law, his indiscreet, disillusioned daughter, and her former sentimental lover, who is no better than he should be. The plot involves them all in a network of suspicions, charges, and counter-charges, and in the end it comes out that they are all alike poor miserable sinners. No one of them can cast a stone at another. The play was not published until 1787. It is sprightly and amusing—quite the thing for the amateur stage at Weimar, where Goethe several times played the role of Alceste, the reprobate lover. But it is not at all edifying, nor is it related in any obvious way to its author's experience. How such a play came to be written just at this time is a puzzling question which is not fully cleared up by the account of its origin in ' Poetry and Truth.'

In the spring of 1770 Goethe followed his star to Strassburg. His larger purpose was to learn and enjoy

as much of life as possible, that he might become wise in the ways thereof. Incidentally he intended to finish his study of the law at a university where the subject was said to be handled in a more practical way than at Leipsic, and then to spend some time in Paris. After that his plans were vague, for the career of a lawyer had never filled his imagination. His heart was in literature, and France was still the source of light and leading, albeit of late the signs of insurgency had been coming thick and fast. The victories of the King of Prussia in the Seven Years' War, Lessing's trenchant criticism in his *Hamburg Dramaturgy,* Klopstock's poetry, the inrushing current from England, the oracular voice of Herder,—all this was fast making an end of French prestige. One may even reckon in Rousseau; for while he used the French language he was not a Frenchman, and his message was in its essence an assault on French civilization.

What actually happened to Goethe on going to the then French city of Strassburg—it had belonged to France since 1681—was to have his French ideals rudely shattered, to kindle with enthusiasm for the things of the fatherland, and to find himself as a German poet. On arriving he made it his first concern to look out over the land from the lofty platform of the high-towering minster. His autobiography dwells warmly on the charm of the Alsatian landscape as it spread out before him. And the great church made a deep impression too—an impression of something majestic, awe-inspiring, incommensurable. He could not account for his own emotions. This was the first Gothic cathedral he had seen, and Gothic was then a synonym for barbarous. He had

expected to see a 'mis-shapen, bristling monster,' and he found a harmonious and mysteriously impressive work of art. He began to study, measure, and compare, returning again and again to the fascinating task. The result was presently (1772) a fervid little essay in defense of the Gothic style, which he erroneously supposed to be German. It is one of the early signs of the gathering reaction in favor of the Middle Ages.

The effect of the cathedral, the work of a German builder and itself believed by Goethe to be an example of German art, was to beget a feeling of pride in his own nationality, with a corresponding dislike of France. This feeling was destined to be greatly intensified by Herder, but even before Herder's arrival in Strassburg the way was being prepared for him. In May Marie Antoinette passed through the town on her way to become the queen of France. By way of royal welcome on the border of her kingdom the officials erected a sort of pleasure-castle on an island in the Rhine, and decorated some of the rooms with tapestries made after cartoons of Raphael. The young student of things-in-general was delighted with them until he came across some large designs representing scenes from the life of Medea, most unhappy and ill-fated of wives. This seemed to him an ominous horror. Where in the world was that inerrant French taste? So strongly did he feel on the subject that he gave vent to his emotions in some French verses that were mercilessly criticized by a French fellow-boarder. Whereupon he gave up in disgust his attempts at French verse-making. The pique went farther. He and his German comrades, tired of being constantly nagged for the bad French they spoke at table,

resolved to eschew that tongue altogether and henceforth to stand on their dignity as Germans. From this time one notices that Goethe's letters are written in German only, and that his language becomes more and more idiomatic, vibrant, tense with his own personal *Eigenart*.

In the fall Herder came to Strassburg—a radical dreamer at war with the spirit of the age, his mind teeming with large literary plans and with prophetic visions of a revitalized poetry, philosophy, religion, and education. He was nearly six years older than Goethe. After leaving the university of Königsberg he had settled in Riga, where he quickly won local fame as a teacher and preacher, and more than local fame as a literary critic. He had then left Russia, spent a few months in France without learning to like it, and now came to Strassburg to be treated for a lacrimal fistula. Goethe called to pay his respects to the noted stranger and the call was the beginning of a memorable friendship.

At first the profit naturally fell mainly to the younger man, who had never before come into contact with so strong and original a personality. His attitude was that of a pupil toward a teacher. Strangely lured by Herder's knowledge and self-assurance, he came again and again and was soon wrestling with him—to use his own expression—as Jacob wrestled with the Lord. The evidence goes to show that Herder was difficult in social intercourse. He could be very amiable and usually was so, but at times he was intolerant and sarcastic. Just now his natural irritability was increased by the suffering incident to the tedious and painful treatment of his eye. Time dragged on for half a year before he was able to get away. During these weary months Goethe

spent a great deal of time with him, bearing much from Herder's occasional ill-humor, but conscious of a gain that more than made up for all such minor trials. He was taking in the gospel of a new era.

Roughly defined it was the gospel of a return to nature, nature being conceived as a pure fountain polluted by civilization. By his reading of Rousseau, his study of Greek and Hebrew poetry, of Shakspere, Ossian, and Percy's 'Reliques,' Herder had come to feel that the glorified Age of Reason was really an age of degeneracy. In his recently published 'Fragments' he had berated his countrymen for trying to imitate the Greeks and Romans. He had undertaken to show by careful analysis that real poetry is always born of conditions—local, temporal, religious, ethnic, linguistic—that come just once and never again. How futile and absurd, then, for Germans to try to be other than Germans and to spend their days debating about the best models for imitation! Poetry, he contended, was singing nature, the mother-language of mankind. Its grand merit was sincerity. The more it smelt of the soil the better. The greatest poets were those who had expressed most fully the life of their own time and place. In his 'Critical Forests' he had set forth the—rather dubious—doctrine that the distinguishing mark of poetry as an art is energy of expression.

Such ideas, poured into the listening ear of Goethe, produced a lively ferment of thought which soon revolutionized his whole way of thinking. Like the light that appeared to Saul of Tarsus, it made a new man of him that saw it. So we quite understand why the author of 'Poetry and Truth,' writing nearly half a century

afterwards, should have cherished a lively sense of his early indebtedness to Herder. Nor is it greatly to be wondered at that modern writers by the score, having such unimpeachable authority, should also make much of this indebtedness and write sometimes as if Herder had been the making of Goethe. But it is quite possible to make too much of the younger man's pupilage and to credit his teacher too heavily. For after all, doctrine or a change of doctrine never yet made a poet and genius is not communicable. When, in the fulness of time, the young law-student whom Herder coached magisterially for half a year without ever mentioning him in his letters or getting any inkling that the youth was marked for immortality,—when Goethe came to produce notable works of the imagination he went his own way and rested firmly on his own endowment. He neither imitated Herder as young writers imitate a master—he was an artist born and Herder everything but an artist—nor did he lean on him for counsel, encouragement, or suggestion. We may be quite sure that he would have found his appointed way without Herder, tho peradventure a little more slowly.

The conversations turned largely on Homer, Shakspere, and Ossian. What Herder admired in Homer was not the infallible artistry that had so impressed Lessing; it was rather the old bard's full-orbed Greekness. The Homeric poems mirrored the life of a peculiar and wonderful people at a fascinating period of its history. To be able to read Homer Goethe returned to his well-nigh forgotten Greek, teaching himself by a method of his own devising. From this time on he remained a faithful lover of the Greeks. Again, Herder's Shak-

spere was not the self-revealing poet, still less the London playwright calculating effects for an audience in a theater; he was Elizabethan England in all the fulness of its many-sided life. Goethe now came back to Shakspere with a new feeling which amounted to sheer intoxication. He felt, so he said, like a blind man who had suddenly received sight. What were the rules of Aristotle, or any other rules, in the presence of such abounding vitality, such opulence of matter, such mighty effectiveness?

As for Macpherson's Ossian, Herder had wrongly taken that at its face value as a genuine monument of ancient Celtic poetry. He imparted his admiration to Goethe, whose mind long continued to be haunted by Ossianic scenes and imagery. Finally, there was the popular ballad. Herder had become deeply interested in the poetry of primitive and unlettered folk, and of course regarded it as better than any of the artificial products of a Frenchified civilization. Here again he found an eager listener in Goethe, who presently took occasion, in one of his rambles, to collect a dozen folk-songs. He caught them, as he wrote excitedly to Herder, from the mouths of ancient grandams, with the old tunes, 'just as God had made them.' With great glee he turned them over to Herder, who included them in his collection published a few years later. In the course of time Goethe did much that was more memorable than this little exploit of which he was so proud at the time, but it is well enough to remember that he was the first German who actually went among the 'folk' to collect their songs. Herder was getting his from books.

Such tension of feeling over so simple a matter as a

few folksongs—and the specimens he had picked up were not particularly good of their kind—shows how Goethe had been keyed up by his intercourse with Herder. Not only had he got hold of some new ideas with regard to the nature of poetry and the criteria of its excellence, but he had become charged with electricity. And yet it was all gray theory in comparison with the golden tree of life that he found blooming in the village of Sesenheim. A peculiar charm invests that portion of 'Poetry and Truth' in which Goethe tells of his brief summer romance with Friederike Brion. There, where the tale is told with exquisite art by one who knew it as no one else can possibly know it, is the place to read it; the modern biographer should stay his hand. Suffice it to say that Goethe found the village maid very bewitching in her country home, loved her, won her love, and spent much time with her in the early summer of 1771. With quite too little thought of the inevitable parting he gave himself up to the delicious idyl, and then, when the time came for him to go home, bade farewell to the sorrowing maid and took himself out of her life.

For this act of unromantic perfidy his conscience tormented him. What he did at last, after drifting too long with the current of passion, was the right thing to do; for a marriage would have been an act of sentimental folly, for her as well as for him. They were not well mated for the prose of life. But while the common sense of mankind makes little of such a fault, and nothing at all when it is the woman who retreats, Goethe himself felt that he had played a shabby part. He says as much in his autobiography, and letters written at the time betray a remorseful state of mind, which,

however, did not last very long. He expiated artistically. For several years to come his scheme of a tragic situation regularly included a girl deserted by her lover. Thus the village maid became the muse of the new-born poet.[1]

[1] Certain writers appear to make a virtue of believing that the relation of Goethe and Friederike was much less idyllic than the famous tenth book of 'Poetry and Truth' would lead one to suppose; in short, that it was very like the relation of Faust and Gretchen. But the evidence adduced is too vague and untrustworthy to compel such a conclusion. It is largely a question of what one *wishes* to believe. An outstanding fact of great moment is that in 1779 Goethe revisited Sesenheim and was received with delight by the entire Brion family.

CHAPTER III

YOUTHFUL TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

In August, 1771, Goethe returned to Frankfort, where he soon took up the practice of Holy Roman law. It was a perfunctory business carried on to please his father. At Strassburg he had given rather more attention to medicine than to law, so that an awkward situation arose when he came to try for his degree. It was open to him either to print and defend a Latin dissertation for the degree of doctor, or to dispute on a few short theses for that of licentiate, which would permit him to practice. Conscious of weakness in jurisprudence and having a nervous dread of publishing anything over his own name, he would have preferred the easier way; but his father demanded that he produce a solid tractate. So, being a fair Latinist, he undertook to solve his problem by writing on a subject that would call for but little research and no great display of learning. In an essay entitled *De Legislatoribus,* which has not been preserved, he proposed a remedy for all friction between church and state: the secular power, while leaving the individual free in matters of faith and conscience, was to establish a form of public worship and compel everybody to observe it.

It was a relief when he was officially informed, after profuse compliments, that his production was not just

the thing to be printed as an academic dissertation. So he now wrote out a number of *positiones juris*—these have been preserved and some of them are mere legal commonplaces—and easily passed the test required of a licentiate. The title of doctor, by which he was henceforth known, was given him by his friends in Frankfort, not by the faculty of Strassburg University.

Doctor Goethe was now twenty-two years old, blest with abounding vitality, free from pecuniary cares, and unfettered by any routine whatsoever. There was time for friendship, for study, for poetizing, or for thinking over his literary projects. 'Götz von Berlichingen' and 'Faust' were already occupying his thoughts, along with a 'Julius Cæsar.' Within his own four walls life was a little less somber than it had been before. Councilor Goethe had become partly reconciled to the erratic ways of his son and now looked forward to seeing him a shining light of jurisprudence. His mother was tenderly devoted to him, and his affection for his sister was such that he felt a pang of jealousy when he heard that she was to marry his old friend Georg Schlosser.

Nevertheless Frankfort seemed to him at first very dull, and his thoughts were often with his Alsatian friends and especially with the wronged Friederike. In a letter he refers to his native place as a sorry hole, a *spelunca.* To let in the light on the cave-dwellers he planned a Shakspere celebration for the 14th of October. Herder, who had now settled in Bückeburg, was invited under promise that his health should be drunk next to that of the 'Will of all Wills.' For this occasion Goethe wrote a fervid address in which he praised Shakspere as a 'beautiful curiosity-box wherein the history of the

world, drawn by the invisible thread of time, moves past before our eyes.' In a burst of enthusiasm he declared, as if he were already an experienced playwright, that he had not hesitated a moment to give up the regular drama with its clogging unities. He had rushed out of the prison-cave of convention and suddenly found that he had hands and feet.

It was in this frame of mind that he set about 'dramatizing' the autobiography of Götz von Berlichingen. He had discussed the matter with Cornelia until she became impatient of so much talk and bade him go to work and write out what was in his mind. He began about the middle of November—without a plan or a thought of the stage. In a short time he was completely absorbed in his enterprise, having 'forgotten Homer, Shakspere, and everything,' save the scenes and characters that were taking shape under his hands. He felt that he was 'dramatizing the history of one of the noblest of Germans and rescuing the memory of a good man.' By the end of the year he had finished the manuscript and dispatched a copy to Herder, who replied coolly—more coolly than he actually felt—: 'Shakspere has completely spoiled you.' But before receiving this opinion Goethe himself had privately decided that his 'Gottfried von Berlichingen'[1] would not do for publication. It would have to be melted up and recast. In fact he had never thought of publication. It was only a 'sketch' that he had thrown off for his own private satisfaction.

In our day the calm student of history can hardly dis-

[1] In the title of the original draft, which was not published until 1832, the hero is called Gottfried. In the version published in 1773 his name is Götz.

cover one of the noblest of Germans in Götz von Berlichingen. He was a typical robber knight of the sixteenth century, who spent the greater part of his life in feudal forays which were mostly undertaken for booty or ransom or to avenge old scores. His raids and plundering expeditions were in open defiance of imperial law (the *Landfriede*), which was at that time the only force making for public order. That he was a sturdy fighter is certain, but of his motives the best that can be said is that he was no worse than his class. But Goethe's imagination, romantically enamored of the brave days of old, saw in him a type of the strong self-helper in an age of anarchy. Taking sides with the outlaw against the law, as did the young Schiller and the young Ibsen after him, he imagined Götz as a towering individualist fighting in a good cause and dying a martyr to liberty. What most concerned him, however, was to portray the fulness of German life in the sixteenth century. Incidentally he punished himself by inventing a perfidious lover and killing him off with poison. His achievement was not a play such as any well-schooled playwright could approve, but the genius of a new epoch was in it.

Hardly was 'Gottfried von Berlichingen' finished before its author was musing over a similarly inclusive play on the subject of Socrates. He took up the study of Plato and Xenophon, and they 'opened his eyes to his own unworthiness.' Then he turned to Anacreon and Theocritus and finally grappled with the Theban eagle. The study of Pindar and the effort to translate him—a version of the fifth Olympic ode has been preserved—may have had something to do with the metrical form of several poems dating from 1772 and 1773 and consisting

of unrimed lines of varying length. Along with these Greek studies he translated parts of 'Ossian' into lofty rhythmic prose and began a play about Mahomet. It was a time of confused groping and experimentation, of turbulent emotions, of a sense of struggling onward—*Nisus nach vorwärts,* he calls it. He was much in the open air, wandering about the country or tramping between Frankfort and Darmstadt. He enjoyed breasting the storm in sheer exuberance of physical energy. The curious poem 'Wanderer's Stormsong,' with its wild talk of pushing forward under the protecting care of Genius, its tense feeling, its grandiloquent language hovering on the brink of nonsense, is a reflex of these lonely buffetings with nature. Strange as it may seem, there is autobiography in the passage of 'Faust' where the conjuror is acted on by the magic of the Earth-spirit. He feels a sudden access of power and courage, would fain battle with the storm, and experiences something very like a volcanic eruption of his emotional nature.

During the winter Goethe became acquainted with J. H. Merck of Darmstadt, a man whose friendship proved highly valuable. Merck was a well-read man of thirty, a good judge of books, a trenchant writer. He had many warm friends, and there were those who feared him for his caustic wit. Urbanity and gentleness were certainly not strong points of his, yet he was hardly so cynical and Mephistophelean as one might infer from the sketch of him in 'Poetry and Truth.' Merck's clear-headedness and good common sense stood his friend in good stead in the days of his emotional storm and stress.

It was in Darmstadt, too, that Goethe fell in with a bevy of sentimental damosels who lionized him tenderly, giving expression to their chaste ardors in ways that often copied those of the earthly Eros. They called one another by poetic names—Psyche, Lila, Urania—held little festivals of gushing sensibility, met with a loving kiss, and parted with a sad embrace. Psyche was Caroline Flachsland, prospective bride of Herder. 'Our heavenly friend,' she wrote to her lover at Bückeburg, in May, 1772, 'is gone again. I parted from him with a kiss and a tear in my heart.' How the fascinating Dr. Goethe played Bunthorne to these ladies can best be read in his poem 'Elysium. To Urania.' Urania was a certain Fräulein von Rousillon, and Elysium was the state attained when, after they had been introduced and had 'sauntered hand in hand o'er holy vales,'

> To him that loved thee
> With quiet yearning
> Thou gavest thy cheek
> For a heavenly kiss.

They called him the Wanderer, sometimes the Confidant. One must remember that this was the era of the beautiful soul—all sighs, raptures, and tears, especially tears. A noble and delicate nature was supposed, quite apart from any definite cause of grief, to reveal itself best in a weepy behavior.

One of the best poems of the year 1772 is entitled the 'Wanderer.' A traveler in Italy comes upon a hut half hidden in vines and bushes. A young mother with a nursing infant greets him and he learns that the hut is built on the ruins of an ancient temple. He indulges

in lofty reflections about art and nature while she talks of her baby. He goes away with a quickened sense of the blessedness of her lot. It is an exquisite picture and the lines are charming in their chaste dignity of expression.

By his connection with Merck Goethe was soon drawn into a lively campaign of review-writing for the Frankfort *Gelehrte Anzeigen.* For just one year—1772—this journal was the organ of a group of literary free-lances who were bent on stirring up and ozonizing the stagnant air of conventional opinion. Their general spirit was the spirit of Herder's radicalism. By the end of a year they had made so much trouble that the magazine was taken out of their hands and ceased to be irritating or interesting. Goethe's contributions, anonymous like all the rest, were often savagely magisterial. They suggest a young Hercules laying about with his club among the bigwigs and pretenders and caring little for aching heads.

Some of the most interesting reviews concern religion and the bible. From childhood Goethe had loved the bible, that is, certain parts of it, and on account of this love he was not to be greatly disturbed by learned proofs of its inconsistency. 'Let the evangelists disagree if only the evangel be consistent,' he said. He had come to feel that the vital essence of religion was a matter of feeling—love and faith welling up in the individual soul—and hence beyond the reach of the critical intellect. He was thus free to regard the bible from his newly-won historical point of view as a wonderful collection of human documents to be understood with reference to time and place and human nature. It irked him to see men using it only as a quarry for creed and dogma and the maxims

of intolerance. In a caustic review of Bahrdt's 'Eden' he wrote:

> If the author had known how to approach the Mosaic writings reverently as one of the oldest monuments of human history, as fragments of an Egyptian pyramid, he would not have drowned the images of Oriental poetry in a homiletic flood; he would not have wrenched off and cut up the limbs of the torso to find in them the ideas of German university professors of the eighteenth century. It is disgusting to have one of these writers presume to tell us how, in the story of Eden or in the image of the Serpent, Eternal Wisdom teaches this and does not teach that.

This view of Scripture reflects the ideas of Herder and of Herder's teacher Hamann, the Magus of the North, with whom Goethe now became acquainted at long range. For a year or two his style, especially when he is writing of religion, is noticeably colored by the oracular mysticism of these two men. In the 'Letter of Pastor ——,' published anonymously in 1772, he set forth his religion of love and tolerance, his hatred of theological dogmatism.

In the month of May he again left home, this time nominally to study the ways of the imperial chamber of justice at Wetzlar. They were very bad ways—a hopeless maze of inefficiency, corruption, and antiquated abuses, a living symbol of the empire's rottenness. Of course Goethe paid little attention to the repellent jungle. Instead he devoted himself to the friends, the moods, and the enjoyments, which were afterwards described with peerless art in 'Werther.' In the charming region about Wetzlar, then in the witching dress of early summer, he soon found cozy nooks to which he would repair, with a volume of Homer or of Pindar in his hand, to

commune with their thoughts or his own. Or perhaps it was to chat with a village maid at the well, to play with little children, to try his hand at sketching, or to lie on his back in the tall grass and revel in the sense of brotherhood with the bugs and worms. For Germany at least a new poetry of nature begins with that summer of 1772, when the young Goethe 'mingled with the universe'—to use Byron's expression—at Wetzlar.

And then another love-idyl and another humble daughter of Eve listed for immortality just for being herself what time a certain Wanderer was passing her way. This time it was Lotte Buff, an embodiment of the solid domestic virtues. The death of her mother had left her in charge of a flock of younger brothers and sisters. There was much work to do and she did it with a cheerful competence. She was betrothed to a lawyer named Kestner, a sensible man of ordinary parts. How Goethe met Lotte as she was cutting bread and butter, liked her, took her to a dance, liked her more and more, visited her often, romped with the little folk, meanwhile winning and holding the friendly regard of her lover—all this has often been recounted since Goethe first told the story by way of explaining the origin of 'Werther.' By the beginning of September he felt that honor and his own peace of mind required him to go away. And he went—without saying farewell. For many a month after his departure he wrote often to Kestner, sending his love to the 'angel' in Wetzlar, raving over her silhouette in his room, and telling of his frequent dreams of her.

On leaving Wetzlar he did not go directly to Frankfort but paid a visit with Merck to Frau von La Roche in Koblenz. Here there was another congress of senti-

mental souls. Frau von La Roche had lately published her tearful novel 'Fräulein von Sternheim,' which had made her a notable person in the literary world. She was the friend of Wieland, who had once been her lover, and she had many connections in the higher social world. An aristocratic lady of much tact, she liked to assemble the notabilities of the day about her and to exhibit her skill in keeping the peace among sentimentalists, rationalists, cynics, and men of the world. Goethe was delighted with this new 'Mama,' as he took to calling her, and still more delighted with her charming daughter Maximiliane. Here too he met the brothers Jacobi and the renowned lady-killer Leuchsenring, who made a specialty of sentimental gossip.

After his return to Frankfort the rest of the year was devoted to the writing of reviews and other minor things and to sketching from nature. This last gradually became a passion, so that he was in doubt whether his call was not to painting instead of poetry or literature. It seemed to him in these days that feeling was the whole of life, and natural expression of feeling the whole of art. He hated affectation. He hated all rules and conventions, all intrusion of the intellect into the sacred temple of the heart. The subject of art was much in his thoughts. It was at this time that he wrote out the insurgent ideas that had been inspired by the Strassburg cathedral and published them, in the cryptic style of a prophet crying in the wilderness, under the title of 'German Architecture.' In the midst of these employments he heard of the suicide of a young man named Jerusalem, whom he had known slightly at Wetzlar. The occurrence made a deep impression on his mind, the more since rumor

ascribed it to hopeless love. He sent to Kestner for a full account of the circumstances, and ere long the tragic story of Werther was taking shape in his imagination.

Early in the year 1773 he set about revising 'Gottfried von Berlichingen.' The revision he made was by no means radical—not at all a concession to the regular drama or to the perverse opinion that he had been spoiled by Shakspere. He knew very well how to construct a regular drama, if he had wished, but he did not wish. He proposed to take nature for a guide; to follow his instinct, his genius, and let the rules go hang. This, he believed, was just what Shakspere had done, and to do likewise was in a sense to imitate Shakspere. So he merely pruned away some excrescences of the old 'Gottfried,' toned down the language a little where it was extravagant or gross, gave a little more care to the motivation of certain scenes, and made the sub-tragedy of Weislingen and Adelheid a little less prominent. When it was done it was still a life-history presented in a succession of dramatic pictures. Even now he was reluctant to publish his work and expected to do some more revising; but Merck made light of his scruples and offered to print it if the author would provide the paper. The thing was done in that way and the new 'Götz' came out anonymously in June. It proved to be the beginning of the greatest of German literary reputations.

As always when genius sets its sovran foot on conventional rule, there were mutterings of disapproval. Lessing, who had lately been showing by precept and example how a stage-play should be constructed, was coolly critical. The King of Prussia characterized 'Götz' as a 'detestable imitation of those bad English

pieces.' But the general voice was like a cry of bravo! Bürger could hardly contain his enthusiasm. Herder and Wieland found good things to say. Perhaps the general opinion was best expressed by a reviewer in the Frankfort *Gelehrte Anzeigen:* 'Form is form; but if the author had written in a Chinese form we should still have to prize his genius.' Today the old rancors over the violation of the dramatic unities have lost interest. We have learned that the rules were made for man. And after all 'Götz' is an effective stage-play when well presented. But its interest, on the boards as in the reading, depends on its variety of incident and character, its picturesque scenes, its human heartiness.

The other work of the year 1773 is now of minor interest, save as it was a preparation for better things to come. This was a time of changing moods and desultory beginnings. The Darmstadt circle broke up. Urania died, Psyche married Herder, the Mercks went to Russia. Kestner married Lotte and took her to Hannover, and Cornelia went away as the wife of Schlosser. Thus Goethe was left with a feeling of loneliness, to 'wander in a desert where there was no water' and to brood over the instability of the loves and friendships which alone made life worth living. His law business bored him. With fitful energy he threw himself into various literary projects the most of which were never completed, tho some were published long afterwards in fragmentary form. His interest in the sixteenth century led him to read Hans Sachs, the cobbler-poet of Nürnberg, in whom he found a kindred nature. The old *Knüttelvers*—a free-and-easy rimed tetrameter—appealed to him because of its bluff German raciness, and he commenced using

it for light satiric skits. In this meter too he commenced 'storming out' his 'Faust.' He wrote a musical comedy, worked now and then at 'Werther,' and pondered much over the relation of the creative artist to the riddle of life.

At times his tendency to hypochondria afflicted him gravely and he had thoughts of suicide. And yet he knew very well that he and some of his contemporaries were suffering from a species of disease. He had inwardly broken with the sentimentalists so far as to be able to view the cult objectively as an artist. Sometimes it appeared to him a sickish absurdity fit for satire, again as a soul-sickness that might have tragic consequences. He resolved to body it forth in its perilous aspect, and to do this with uncompromising realism on the basis of his own experience at Wetzlar. This experience would suffice for the happier part of the story, while the suicide of Jerusalem gave the hint for a tragic ending. But his own idyl had not ended disastrously; Kestner had not been jealous. A new motive was needed. Toward the end of the year the charming Maxe von La Roche came to Frankfort as the bride of an elderly widower named Brentano. The marriage had been arranged for her by her scheming mother and she was not happy. Goethe undertook to make things pleasant for her in his way and the result was a painful scene with the husband. Insensibly the Albert and Lotte of his imagination began to take on the features of Brentano and Maxe.

In February, 1774, he shut himself up in his room to fix on paper his melancholy vision of hopeless love and suicide. In four weeks of such complete seclusion and intense concentration that he afterwards likened it to a

sleep-walking trance, it was finished. The following autumn it appeared in print as the 'Sufferings of Young Werther' and soon achieved one of the most memorable triumphs in the whole history of literature. From this time forth Goethe was the cynosure of German eyes, the accepted prophet of a new era.

It would not be worth while to tell again, even briefly, the oft-told story of the Werther craze. But however absurd it may seem today and seemed at the time to the sober-minded, it was at bottom an honest tribute of admiration for a wonderful book. Such emotional excitement over the printed page had never before been known in Germany. No book of any kind had ever before so touched the general heart, had ever loosed such a flood of sympathetic tears. It did not seem to be mere literature, but life itself; and alas for the badness of a world that had done to death so excellent a youth as Werther!

Dull wits—so they seem now—took it for a defense of suicide, but it should be remembered that, speaking broadly, the best minds in Germany had not yet got beyond the point of regarding imaginative literature as the handmaid of religion and morality. How could a writer depict unethical conduct without sanctioning it as a man and a brother? Goethe's advice, 'Be a man and do not follow his example,' must have seemed to his critics as if a man should poison the air and then advise people not to breathe it. For it would have been so easy for poor Werther to keep his bark afloat. A little common sense and self-control, even a little more persistent devotion to the sketching over which he had merely dawdled, would have saved him. Not many had as yet reflected that the sad consequences of passionate error,

whether in life or in literature, might always be avoided if only men were not what they are and life not what it is. Today the interesting thing about 'Werther' is not its ethical tendency, for it has none, but its epoch-making art. On that subject there will be something to say in the Second Part of this volume.

It was Goethe's way to rid himself of mental trouble by raising it to the *n*th power in a work of the imagination. After the writing of 'Werther' he was immune to Wertherism; he had expelled the poison from his system. Yet he had not by any means acquired the virtue of calmness in the presence of the sphinx, if indeed that be a virtue. On the contrary, he was now as much as ever under the dominance of his emotional nature, his moods, passions, and whims. The work of 1774 and 1775 reflects a period of intense but desultory creative energy. It includes rollicking and satirical farce, musical comedy, exquisite songs and ballads, sentimental drama of fickle love, and poetic tragedy of titanic revolt. All of these things welled up from the sub-conscious realm of feeling and vision with but little control by the critical intellect. For the psychic state out of which his youthful creations were born, and for the psychic process that gave them birth, the maturer Goethe had two untranslatable names: for the former *Dumpfheit,* and for the latter *hinwühlen.*

Among the lighter writings of this period is the little prose farce entitled 'Gods, Heroes, and Wieland,' which was dashed off quickly in a mood of satiric humor over Wieland's claim to have improved on Euripides as a delineator of Greek character. Wieland had now settled in Weimar and started his *Teutscher Merkur,* which was

destined to have a long and creditable career. He was disliked by the sentimentalists because his newest manner seemed to deal too lightly with the sacred things of the heart. As a respecter of things French he was an object of loathing to the virtuous Teutons of Göttingen, with whom Goethe had lately come into connection as an occasional contributor to their *Musenalmanach.* Up with Klopstock, down with Wieland, was the prime article of their creed. For a little while Goethe shared this curious pique against the genial Wieland. His none too amusing skit was taken in good part by its victim, who even praised it in the *Merkur* as a good thing of its kind. It proved no bar to a life-long friendship.

Other humorous bagatelles took the form of the old shrovetide play in doggerel verse. Such was the ' Annual Fair at Plundersweilern,' a collection of diverting character-sketches illustrating the Vanity Fair of Frankfort life. It afterwards proved acceptable on the amateur stage at Weimar and is still playable. In ' Pater Brey ' Goethe paid his respects to the sentimental fraud Leuchsenring, and in ' Satyros ' to the satyr masking as a sentimentalist. The personal allusions are too deeply disguised to be made out with certainty. In these pieces and in others of their kind the author's point of view is that of an amused observer of the human comedy. His stage-craft is of the simplest and the thin plot is only an excuse for the character-sketches. In the contemporary music-dramas ' Erwin and Elmire ' and ' Claudine von Villa Bella ' the dramatic element is also of small account, being little more than a conventional setting for the interspersed songs.

With his strong bent for the dramatic form of expres-

sion, with the teaching of Lessing before his eyes, and with the criticism of 'Götz von Berlichingen' ringing in his ears, it was but natural that Goethe should wish to show that he too could do a stage play in accordance with the rules of the game; that is, a play with the action concentrated and the unities observed. He had become interested in the memoirs of Beaumarchais, wherein that versatile Frenchman told of his sister's wrongs at the hands of a certain Spaniard named Clavijo. The story was that Clavijo as a poor clerk had engaged himself to Marie Beaumarchais and then, when he began to rise in the world, had thought to cast her off as an encumbrance; whereupon Beaumarchais had hurried to Madrid as his sister's champion and compelled Clavijo to keep his promise. Here was just the thing for a play: a fickle lover who deserts his sweetheart for prudential reasons, a wronged girl, an avenging brother. It was only necessary to invent a cold-hearted worldling as Clavijo's confidant and adviser, to let the sickly Marie die of her wrongs, and to kill off Clavijo for his sins, and the plot of a sentimental tragedy of desertion was all complete. Goethe wrote his 'Clavigo' very rapidly—in a week, says 'Poetry and Truth'—making free use of Beaumarchais' exact language. It was published in 1774 and served its purpose. Technically it has always been regarded as a good piece of work.

A similar verdict can hardly be rendered in the case of 'Stella,' published in 1775 as another variation of the ever-insistent theme of the inconstant lover. An emotional weakling marrying two women in succession and deserting both for no better reason than a love of freedom and variety—this was a scheme which could not

possibly be made acceptable. The original solution, by which the forsaken wives agreed to share the delectable Fernando between them, was too bizarre even for an age that delighted above all things in asserting the claims of the afflicted heart against the usages of society. It was very like making comedy of sacred things. In later editions of the play Fernando is made to take himself off with a pistol-shot. This is certainly better from the stage point of view, but it does not really mend matters. 'Stella' suffers incurably from its hero's lack of every-day manliness. One feels that the sympathetic tear is wasted in such a case as his.

Feeling at war with the world—this was for Goethe in these years of storm and stress the fundamental aspect of life's tragedy. If a hero of his was weak and unoccupied, with nothing to do but brood over his own emotions and sigh for another man's wife, he might end like Werther by 'puking up his miserable existence.' But if he was strong and self-reliant, with a will to fight and endure, then there were different possibilities. In case his sea of troubles consisted of the unnecessary arrangements of man, we get a Götz von Berlichingen going down in a futile struggle against the crooked politics of the Holy Roman Empire. If, however, the sea of troubles was simply the nature of things on earth, then we have a drama of titanic revolt against the ever-living gods—a 'Prometheus,' a 'Faust.' Among all the unfinished projects of Goethe's youth the torso condition is most to be regretted in the case of 'Prometheus.' No modern poet—not even Shelley—has achieved anything finer in a mood of revolt than that splendid soliloquy of the Titan-artist as he 'fashions men' in proud reliance on his own

genius, and hurls defiance at the wretched Olympians who would starve but for the sacrifices doled out to them by fools dreaming of things that are not.

But, splendid as the Prometheus fragment is, it is probable that the insurgent thoughts which might have gone into it were all sooner or later poured into 'Faust.' For Faust too is an insurgent in the grand style, who tugs at the chains of human existence in the vain hope of breaking them. The old magician who had sold his soul to the devil had gradually taken shape in Goethe's imagination as a misunderstood searcher for satisfying truth; as a dreamer of transcendental dreams who, disappointed in his first attempt to conquer the spirit-world by natural magic, had leagued himself with a sensual demon—not from unholy curiosity, but from a passionate desire of universal experience. Just how the singular play would have ended if it had been finished in 1775 no one can say positively.[1] Much was written at that time, but the most of the early scenes relate to Faust's love and betrayal of Margaret—the most moving of German love-tragedies, but only a passing episode in the great drama of 'Faust.'

Along with 'Faust' Goethe worked on a tragedy 'Egmont,' conceiving the character quite unhistorically as a 'demonic' nature borne on to his doom by sheer buoyancy of spirit. For a while, also, he took a lively interest in Lavater's project of creating a science of the human features; he contributed a mass of material, both text and drawings, to the famous 'Physiological Fragments.' It is possible too, but not certain, that even at this early date he began to think of a novel that should

[1] Farther on, in Chapter XVI, a guess is hazarded.

serve as a sort of antidote to 'Werther'; a story in which the hero, very much like Werther in many respects, should be saved from despair by his devotion to an art.

Finally, there are a few songs dating from this period. Their number is not great, and their lyric quality will be considered further on in the chapter entitled 'The Poet.' Among the best are the 'King of Thule,' incorporated in 'Faust,' and 'New Life, New Love.' This 'new love,' poetically called Lili, was a Fräulein Schönemann, to whom, for a few months of the year 1775, Goethe was engaged to be married. The engagement was a cause of infinite worriment, in which passionate infatuation, craven doubts, grim resolve, fears, and anxieties, all played a part. At one time he thought of quitting the bad Old World altogether and settling with Lili in the wilds of Pennsylvania. Finally the engagement was broken off—probably at the instance of the young woman's family. She was the daughter of a banker and fond of the social whirl. He was without prospect of an independent income and did not care for the social whirl. What he liked best was to commune abstractedly with the spirits of his poetic dream-world. His ways must have been inurbane at times, for they called him the 'bear.'

Toward the end of the year 1775 the Wanderer came to what proved to be the most momentous turning-point of his whole life. During the summer he had visited Switzerland, tramped about the Bernese Oberland, and received the impressions which were afterwards published under the title of 'Letters from Switzerland.' He had thought of continuing his journey into Italy, but the magnet in Frankfort was too strong and pulled him

back. After viewing the Promised Land from the summit of the Gotthard he set his face toward home. Not long after his return he met the young duke of Weimar, Karl August, who had just taken the reins of government into his own hands. They had met twice before: once in December, 1774, when the boy prince was on the way to Paris with his tutor, and again in May, 1775, while he was visiting Karlsruhe. Being now his own master at the age of eighteen, Karl August was minded to make friends with the handsome Dr. Goethe, whom everybody was talking about and who seemed to be a man after his own heart. There was now a cordial invitation to visit the Weimar court. Nothing was said as yet of any official position—it was to be only a visit. And yet both prince and poet may each have had his own thoughts as to what might happen in case they should suit each other.

CHAPTER IV

NOVITIATE IN WEIMAR

It has sometimes been accounted a sort of treason to the poet's calling that Goethe should have allowed himself, during ten precious years of his early manhood, to be absorbed in the business and amusements of a petty provincial court. One thinks of Apollo tending the sheep of Admetus. Certain it is that the work of these toilsome years could have been done as well, for the most part, by a man of commoner stuff, while the work that was temporarily neglected was possible to no one else. Nevertheless there is another side to the matter. In the Germany of that day the career of letters was virtually impossible unless supported by a salary. At the very best the rewards of authorship were meager and uncertain. As a Frankfort lawyer Goethe was tied to a profession that he disliked; as a writer of books he was without prospect of a living income. Moreover, it was precisely the poet in him that demanded a new environment. He had, so to speak, used up the city of his birth, and his riotous imagination needed a fresh contact with life in a different sphere. We may even say that it needed, for a while at least, the counterpoise of routine employment.

The Weimar of that day—Goethe arrived there early in November, 1775,—could have made no claim to dis-

tinction among German cities. Everything was on a small scale. The total area of the duchy was a little more than half that of Rhode Island or of the English county of Cornwall. The diminutive state was poor in resources and had hardly recovered from the industrial and financial troubles incident to the Seven Years' War. The city itself had a population of about six thousand and was as yet almost a stranger to the amenities of art and wealth. The most pretentious building of the place, the ducal palace, had lately burned to the ground. Such being the conditions, it was a bold dream of the young duke to convert his modest little capital into the German Athens.

This fine ambition, however, was itself the slowly-ripening fruit of Goethe's influence; at present Karl August was mainly bent on enjoying himself in his own way with friends whom he liked for their personal qualities. During his minority his mother, the widowed duchess Amalia, had ruled as regent, winning the general regard by her tact and genial disposition. Unlike her uncle, the King of Prussia, she took a lively interest in German letters and was especially fond of the drama. It was she who secured Wieland for Weimar by calling him there as a tutor to the crown prince. The education of her younger son, Constantin, she entrusted to Karl Ludwig Knebel, also a man of poetic bent. She was still young, only thirty-six, when Karl August's accession to power left her comparatively free for the intellectual and esthetic interests in which she found her greatest delight. The new reigning duchess, a Darmstadt princess, to whom Karl August had lately been married, was a gentle, conventionally-minded woman—

Goethe's letters often refer to her as the 'angel Louise' —whose temperament did not harmonize very well with that of her husband.

As for Karl August, his views of life were as yet those of unspoiled boyhood. Full of vim and energy, fond of the long tramp and the hard ride, indifferent to comfort and luxury, he detested all tameness and especially the stiff formalities of court society. He liked to hunt, to play the soldier, to battle with the elements and camp in the woods at night, to flirt with the village maids. Withal, as time abundantly proved, he was a youth of sterling character, amenable to counsel in weighty public affairs, and eager to make his mark as a good ruler. To win the affection and confidence of such a Prince Hal and plant in his mind the seeds of political idealism seemed to Goethe a good thing to do. What wonder if, for the nonce, it seemed a better thing than to go on writing stories and plays and getting oneself misunderstood by the blear-eyed critics?

Those immediately about the duke were mainly young men who held some sort of official position, but were not overworked and devoted their surplus energy to larking, poetizing, and play-acting. Some of them, notably Seckendorff, Einsiedel, and Bertuch, came to be known as minor lights of literature. With them, as also with Knebel and Chief Forester Wedel and Chamberlain Kalb, Goethe soon became more or less intimate. For a few weeks after his arrival he took a leading part in the frolics, as if they were the chief end of man. He was much in the home of Wieland, the whole family taking him permanently to its heart. The more he saw of the duke, who also wrote verse on occasion, the more he

respected and liked him. When asked if he knew a good candidate for the position of general superintendent of church affairs, he suggested his old friend Herder and at once set about working in a quiet way to bring about the appointment. As Herder had a reputation for heterodoxy this involved some wire-pulling in opposition to the local clergy. The visitor began to feel at home in his new role, albeit he lacked money to support it and was obliged, in his distress, to borrow of friend Merck and others. Tongues began to wag over the wild conduct of the duke, ascribing it to the debauching influence of his new comrade. But each felt that he had found a friend after his own heart, and by mid-winter there was an understanding between them. A letter of February 14, 1776, written by Goethe to his confidential friend Johanna Fahlmer, runs in part as follows:

> I shall probably stay and play my role as well as I can, so long as it pleases myself and fate. Were it only for a few years, it is better than an idle life at home, where with all my eagerness I can do nothing. Here at any rate I have a brace of duchies before me. My present concern is to become acquainted with the country, and even that is giving me much satisfaction. The duke too is acquiring thereby a love of work; and as I know him I am not troubled by certain matters.

In short, Karl August had decided to keep his friend in Weimar by offering him a seat in the council of state, a project in which he was opposed by his chief minister, Fritsch, and other influential personages. And indeed, according to all the standards of the time, it was a strange thing to do; for Goethe had no *von* in his name, he was without experience in public affairs, and his reputation was that of a young genius of unsteady ways and

a turn for frivolity. The venerated author of the 'Messiah' was shocked by the rumors and sent his friend a cautionary message, which drew out a sharp reply advising 'dear Klopstock' to write no more such letters, since they would do no good. In his seemingly quixotic purpose the duke had the powerful support of his mother. It is probable that neither she nor her son had in mind any very definite sphere of statecraft for the new official, and certainly they did not foresee that in a few years he would become the chief minister of the duchy. But they liked him personally, admired his gifts, and felt that in all the artistic interests of the court he would be a valuable coadjutor.

And so it came about that in June, 1776, Goethe took his seat in the council with the title of Privy Councilor of Legation and a salary of twelve hundred talers. From this time forth he took his new responsibilities very seriously, but there was at first not much for him to do. It was several years before the burden of office became really oppressive. Having thus time to orient himself, he traveled much about the duchy, familiarizing himself with its physical features, its industries, and its needs. Much of his time went to landscape-drawing. His letters refer but rarely to matters of public concern, so that one has difficulty in imaging the serious background of his life. They are occupied with private business and personal news, with his goings and comings, and especially with the state of his emotions.

The most intimate of the letters are those written to Charlotte von Stein, who soon became his muse and confidant. She was a wife and the mother of several children, her husband being the duke's equerry. Goethe was

introduced to her not long after his arrival in Weimar, found in her a new ideal of womanhood at its very best, and presently began to pay homage to her in the language of an ardent lover. She attracted him not by her beauty, but by a certain soulful benignity, as of one chastened by experience, superior to folly, and secure in her own adorable goodness. So at least his imagination conceived her; not, however, until she had repeatedly checked his ardors. Her letters are lost, but it is clear enough from his that his adoration was more than welcome, if only it were kept within Platonic limits and did not compromise her. At first he was disposed to rebel. In a letter of May 24, 1776, he writes:

> So then this relation, the purest, most beautiful, truest, that I have ever had with any woman except my sister, is to be disturbed! . . . I will not see you, your presence would make me sad. If I am not to be near you your love helps me as little as the love of the absent ones in which I am so rich. In the moment of need it is the living presence which decides everything, which soothes and strengthens. The absent friend arrives with his hose when the fire is out. And all this for the world's sake! The world, which can be nothing to me, will not allow you to be anything to me either. They know not what they do.

By this time, however, Frau von Stein seems to have convinced herself that she had nothing to lose and much to gain by becoming the confidant of a poet and letting herself be worshiped as a superior being. At any rate the pair took no pains to conceal their liking for each other. It was known to everybody and accepted by everybody, Stein among the rest, as a matter of course. Goethe was much at her house and wrote to her very often—sometimes twice a day, or even when they chanced to

be under the same roof. He addressed her as dearest lady, golden lady, angel, soother, comforter. She it was, he assured her, whom he loved as he had loved no woman before; who calmed his troubled soul and gave him peace in his vague unrest.

But even with the help of his madonna he did not quickly subdue his tendency to moodiness. It was comparatively easy to steel himself against real troubles and vexations; not so easy, however, to conquer that inner turbulence which had driven Werther to despair. The pathologist may rightly view this as a morbid and perilous symptom, due to his having lived for years in a state of chronic emotional tension, without the right outlet for his energies and aspirations, and to his having convinced himself that the whole goodness of life was summed up in feeling and its artistic expression. At the same time this restlessness was a part of his poet's dower, without which he had not been Goethe. As such it presently found its appropriate symbol in Orestes tormented to madness by the Furies and healed by the discovery of a noble-minded sister. At Weimar, when the demons tormented him, he often had recourse to travel, getting comfort and renewed strength from nature, from intercourse with simple folk, or from mere observation of the motley human spectacle.

Thus in December, 1777, he made a trip alone and incognito to the Harz Mountains and climbed the Brocken amid snow and ice at a time when the feat was deemed impossible. 'How I have learned on this dark journey,' he wrote to Frau von Stein, 'to love that class of men we call the lower, but which for God is assuredly the highest!' The following May he visited Berlin with the

duke. 'I have been right close to old Fritz,' he wrote, 'I have seen his bearing, his gold, silver, marble, apes, parrots, and torn curtains, and have heard his own scoundrels arguing about the great man!'

Of greater importance was a journey to Switzerland which he took in the fall of the year 1779—again in company with the duke, whom he wished to infect with a love of the mountains and of plain untitled folk. Before setting out he wrote gleefully to his mother, directing her how to prepare her house for the reception of a reigning prince and his retinue. The duke was to sleep on a straw-sack in the 'little room,' and all the other arrangements were to be on a like plane of Spartan simplicity. After a few pleasant days at Frankfort the party proceeded up the Rhine. At Sesenheim Goethe visited the Brion family, who received him with effusive delight. Friederike was glad to recall the old memories, her parents assured him that he had grown younger. It was all very comforting—nowhere a hint of anything painful in the past. At Strassburg he called on Lili, now a wife and a mother, and here too he found only joy and admiration. And then came two bracing, soul-renewing months in the Swiss Alps. Again he climbed the Gotthard, looked over into Italy, and again turned back, saying to himself, 'Not yet, but before I die.' The record of this journey, faithfully kept for Charlotte von Stein, abounds in expressions which tell of a renewed joy in life and of a deep satisfaction in the sanative and invigorating power of nature.

It is next in order to speak of Goethe's official life and the studies that grew out of it. The first task that fell to his hands was that of a commissioner of mines—

a rather unpromising field since the mineral wealth of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach was quite insignificant. There were at Ilmenau, however, some old mines that had been abandoned and allowed to fill with water. The question was whether they could be reopened and made to pay. To this problem the new minister addressed himself with zeal by taking up the study of mineralogy and seeking to familiarize himself with the geology of the duchy. What interested him was not so much to learn the names and properties of minerals as to get an idea of the genetic process by which nature had sculptured the land. Why had she placed one species of rock here and another there? What was the order and the logic of her procedure? In these pursuits he found great satisfaction, tho they came to nothing from the practical point of view. His first reports held out the hope that something might be done with the Ilmenau mines, which had been worked for argentiferous copper schist, but in the end they were given up as hopeless. 'It has cost me much time, trouble, and money,' he said, 'but in return I have learnt something and acquired views of nature which I would not part with at any price.'

Branching out from the study of the rocks, he began to concern himself with botany and anatomy, more especially with the comparative morphology of the vertebrate skeleton. It seemed to him curious that the study of plants should consist so largely in dissecting them in order to find out their Latin name according to the system of Linné. This procedure seemed to him quite futile. What he wanted to know was the plan or idea by which nature worked. His study of skulls and skeletons soon convinced him that 'man is very closely akin to

the animals,' and that everything in nature had resulted from the working of law or laws. What were these laws and how did they operate? By such inquiries he was led gradually to those views of organic evolution and those discoveries—small in themselves but of large import for the understanding of the whole Goethe—which have given him a modest place in the history of science.

In 1779 he became commissioner of war and highways, and in this capacity had occasion to go about a great deal attending to the recruiting of soldiers and the building of roads. Thus he was brought into contact with the plain people and led to ponder on the relation of soil and climate and other physical conditions to social life and economic welfare. In 1782 he received a patent of nobility—an event about which he declared that he 'could think just nothing at all'—and was made president of the chambers, thus becoming the chief administrator of the duchy. He found the finances in disorder and set about restoring the balance between income and expenditure. For about two years he devoted himself mainly, in the end with complete success, to this branch of the public business. Withal he gave much attention to educational affairs, particularly to the University of Jena, and it was he who planned the charming little Weimar park.

Thus had the morbid, emotional, introspective poet developed into a self-assured man of the world and a masterful statesman. To be sure, his sphere of activity was small. He had not been tried in the crucible of world-politics, nor called upon to decide great issues of national war and peace. Still there were problems and difficulties enough, and he handled them to the satisfac-

tion of his prince and the leading men of the little state. With truth it could be said of him that he came and saw and conquered. By his devotion to duty and the charm of his personal bearing he gradually won the cordial esteem of all but a few small souls who could not forget that he was not of noble birth and were jealous of his influence with the duke. The outside world, if they looked that way, saw a proof that poetic genius was not always incompatible with vigorous and successful statecraft.

It was but natural that such pursuits and responsibilities should produce little by little a sobering and clarifying effect. After all, feeling was *not* everything. Work was also good for the soul. Form had its due place in life as in art. The reign of law was everywhere, and fascinating questions presented themselves on every hand to the inquiring mind. There was joy to be had in the life of the intellect. In the long light of time nothing was meaningless, nothing wholly bad, tho much could be improved. To know this interesting world as it really is and work for a definite betterment was preferable to fretting in despair over the nature of things. The only object of revolt could be to prepare the way for a saner order; insurgency was not itself a word of wisdom. Nature's method was that of bit-by-bit progress, not that of violence and eruption. The excellence and dignity of human nature were not best shown in a riot of emotion, but in the stedfast control of emotion by the truth-seeking reason.

Among the various rills that fed this stream of thought we must reckon in the reading of the ' Ethics ' of Spinoza, a book to which Goethe himself expressly ascribes great

influence in the shaping of his views. He says that he found in Spinoza that which 'quieted his passions and afforded him a large and free outlook over the world of sense and of morals' What especially drew him to the Jew philosopher, we are told, was the boundless unselfishness of his doctrine, as implied in the saying, 'Whoso truly loves God will not expect that God shall love him in return.' Goethe had certainly read Spinoza at Frankfort, but at that time he did not fully understand him; so that it was not until afterwards that the seed then planted bore its characteristic fruit. In the pre-Weimarian Goethe there is really very little of the Spinozan temper—hardly more than occasional hints of it. But at Weimar the 'intellectual love of God' gradually became, it is hardly too much to say, the dominant note of all his thinking.

In circumstances such as have been described it is not very strange that poetic production languished. Not one of the more famous works of Goethe reached its final form during that first decade in Weimar. It was not merely that there were at first too many distractions, and later on too many official cares; the deeper cause of the seeming sterility of this period was the difficulty of finding a form suited to the new ideas and ideals. The old style would no longer do; he had become alienated from his former self, and the new self demanded a more delicate instrument of expression. And so he groped along for years to find the way which leads from the realistic prose of 'Werther' and 'Clavigo' to the exquisite blank verse of 'Iphigenie' and 'Tasso.'

Meanwhile he bravely performed his part as a purveyor of dramatic bagatelles for the amateur stage of the court

circle. Down to 1780 there was no theater where professional actors could appear, so the local enthusiasts gave their plays here and there, transporting their modest properties from a cheap hired hall in the city to the park at Belvedere, the 'heights of Ettersburg or Tiefurt's vale,' according as whim or convenience dictated. In point of talent the mainstay of the Weimar Thespians was Corona Schröter, an accomplished actress and singer whom Goethe liked so well that he wished God might give him such a woman for a wife. She was the first Iphigenie, for her he wrote 'Proserpina,' and it was partly her talent that kept alive his interest in musical drama. 'Proserpina' is a serious poetic monodrama which has no other aim than to revivify the Greek myth and make the goddess seem humanly real. Its effect was ruined at Weimar by giving it as an intermezzo in the 'Triumph of Sentimentalism,' a satirical burlesque in which Goethe made fun of the whole sentimental tribe, himself along with the rest. The rather tame 'Lila' has for its theme the healing of a disordered mind by cleverly humoring its vagaries. In its original form it alluded delicately to the strained relations of Karl August and his wife. The 'Fisher-maid,' beginning with the famous ballad 'Elf-king,' was played in the evening on the river-bank at Tiefurt, with pretty torchlight effects. Best of all among the lighter pieces is the 'Birds,' a laughable modernization of Aristophanes. The serious one-act play 'Brother and Sister,' written in October, 1776, treats of a girl's passionate love for a kind guardian whom she has wrongly supposed to be her brother. If it reflects any actual human relationship, such as that of Goethe to his real sister Cornelia, or to his sister-by-

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(1782) we have a loyal friend's tribute to the able factotum who provided stage and scenery for the plays. Here better than anywhere else we glimpse the more ideal aspect of those modest histrionic efforts. The noble poem 'Ilmenau,' sent as a birthday gift to Karl August on the 3rd of September, 1783, is a sort of elegy in which Goethe reviews his life in Weimar, hints of his high hopes and their imperfect realization, and characterizes some of the friends who have stood nearest him. The greater and better part is devoted to the duke himself. There is hardly a finer poem of friendship in the German language. The drift of his mind in the direction of a new humanism as the ideal goal in ethics is seen in the poem 'The Divine,' which might equally well have been called 'The Human.' Beginning with the words, 'Let man be noble, helpful, and good,' it argues the thesis that these qualities alone distinguish man from all beings that we know.

Some time in the early eighties Goethe conceived the idea of a long narrative poem which should boldly set forth his ideals of life in the form of a romantic tale of symbolic import. It was to be written in *ottava rima*, a fact in itself significant of a growing willingness to subject himself to the definite limitations of an approved artistic form. It was probably his well-known admiration of Wieland's 'Oberon' (1780), coupled with his later study of Tasso and Ariosto, which begot the wish to try his hand on the stricter form of the romantic eight-line stanza. The poem was to be called the 'Mysteries' and to set forth the experiences of a band of twelve knights, representing as many different religions, who had withdrawn from the vanities of life and banded

themselves together in a secret order for the purpose of learning the higher wisdom under the tuition of a mysterious sage called Humanus. The notion of the secret society as the repository of precious esoteric truth not discoverable on the highways of life was just then very much in favor. The new order of Illuminati, or Perfectibilists, founded in 1776 as a sort of fresh avatar of the older Rosicrucians, was attracting a great deal of attention with its awesome hierarchy of members pledged to strict obedience and rising gradually from 'novice' and 'minerval' through the various grades of freemasonry to 'priest,' 'magus,' and 'king.' Goethe himself joined the freemasons in 1780 and remained thereafter a fairly loyal member of the lodge.

The poem was never finished. Its interest would have culminated in the wonderful teaching of Humanus, whereby the various members of the order would gradually slough off all the narrowness and contentiousness of creed, tradition, and nationality, and stand forth as the purified apostles of human brotherhood and active well-doing. We see that Goethe's mind was here moving, through a haze of romantic mysticism, toward a doctrine which is essentially that of Lessing's 'Nathan' and Herder's 'Ideas.' By way of introduction he wrote fourteen superb stanzas in which he represented himself as taking a glorious morning walk and receiving, from out the dissolving mists, the 'veil of Poesy from the hand of Truth.' These lines he afterwards decided to place at the head of his poetic works under the title of 'Dedication.' Of the 'wondrous song' yclept the 'Mysteries' he wrote but forty-four stanzas, which barely carry us over the threshold of the great argument. In after years

the author of 'Faust' came to the conclusion that the final wisdom is to be found, not by withdrawing from life into the cloistered seclusion of a mystic brotherhood, but by living it out bravely in the haunts of men.

It has already been remarked that none of the major works of Goethe was completed during his novitiate in Weimar. He did some work on 'Egmont' at different times, none at all on 'Faust.' In the spring of 1779, amid the distractions and banalities incident to the new business of recruiting soldiers, he wrote, or rather dictated, the first draft of 'Iphigenie.' It was performed in April, with Goethe himself as Orestes, Knebel as Thoas, Prince Constantin as Pylades. It was an unusually short play, severely simple in structure, lofty in style, and strictly observant of the once despised unities. The form was prose, partly with and partly without an iambic cadence. The characters and plot were conceived substantially as they appear in the final revision, and the effect of the performance was good. Its author noticed with pleasure that 'pure souls' enjoyed it. But he was not content with the form, which was neither prose nor verse and had many clinging remnants of the old realistic manner. He saw that he must get rid of these defects, yet he did not at once decide in favor of verse. In 1780 he rewrote it all, preserving the prose form at least to the eye, but still it did not satisfy him. After this the teasing problem of finding a style suited to the lofty, almost ethereal, character of his heroine, was laid aside until the year of his departure for Italy.

In the spring of 1780 he began 'Torquato Tasso.' No wonder the theme attracted him, since it presented such a complete parallel to his own position: a hyper-sensitive

poetic dreamer living at a petty court, enjoying the friendship of a high-minded prince, in love with a high-born lady whom he could never marry, viewed with jealous dislike by 'practical' men who thought themselves better than he. Two acts of a prose 'Tasso' were written in 1780 and 1781, and then this enterprise also came to a halt. In this case, probably, the cessation of work was due not only to dissatisfaction with the prose form, but also to a lack of clearness as to the essential import of the play as a whole.

To this same period (1781-1783) belongs the puzzling fragment 'Elpenor.' The play was intended to commemorate the birth of a long 'hoped-for' crown prince, but from the extant portion, consisting of the first act and a part of the second, it is quite impossible to make out the design. Enough that Goethe afterwards characterized it, in a letter to Schiller, as an instance of 'incredible blundering in the choice of a subject and a warning example of God knows what besides.'

Finally, there was 'Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Mission,' a novel in which Goethe set out to record his own experience of play-acting and incidentally to portray the histrionic conditions of the country at large. There was just then an increasing disposition to think and talk about the artistic side of the actor's calling. Young Schiller, making an address at Mannheim in 1784, compared the social utility of the theater to that of the law and the church. In short, it was in the air to magnify the theater, and this should be borne in mind by the reader of 'Wilhelm Meister,' which its author seems to have regarded, for a while at least, as the most important of all his literary projects. Beginning in 1777, he worked on it

intermittently for eight years. His diary and letters refer to it very frequently. By 1785 he had completed six books and carried the story to the point where Wilhelm, still hopeful of his mission, notwithstanding all the disgusts and disillusionments that have come to him in the course of his vagabond life with the actor-folk, decides to join the company of his friend Serlo and to seek in the theater the goal of his higher aspirations. These six books were afterwards rewritten and condensed, so that they correspond very nearly to the first four books of the famous novel which appeared in 1796 under the changed title 'Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship.'[1]

What was the 'mission' of this unheroic hero whose character includes so much that is Goethe along with so much that is not, and whose histrionic efforts, amorous entanglements, romantic adventures, and philosophic opinions are recounted with such excess of leisurely particularity? There is little room for doubt that when he began the novel Goethe had in view a sort of antidote to 'Werther.' With a nature very like Werther's, Wilhelm Meister was to be saved by finding something to do; something that would lift him out of the dulness and banality of middle-class life, employ his artistic ability, and give him the sense of living to some purpose. The title did not mean at first what it came to mean in the

[1] In 1784 Goethe began sending a copy of his manuscript in installments to his Zürich friend, Frau Barbara Schulthess. This lady and her daughter were so delighted with the story that they proceeded to make a copy of it, in order that they might continue to possess the treasure after the loaned manuscript had been returned. It was this copy of a copy which was lately discovered in Zürich by G. Billeter and was soon afterwards (1910) published, both by the house of Cotta and in the Weimar edition of Goethe's works, under the editorship of H. Maync.

course of time, namely, Wilhelm Meister's vain dream of a theatrical mission. On the contrary, he was really to become a good actor, perhaps the director of a theater, and to find satisfaction in working for higher standards of dramatic performance.

But why, one asks, did not Goethe select as the saving art the one in which he himself had found the greatest pleasure? Why did he not plan a 'poetic' instead of a 'theatrical' mission for his hero? The answer is, in the first place, that Wilhelm Meister really is a dramatic poet as well as an actor. Secondly, it must be remembered that in 1777 Goethe was not yet clear as to his own poetic mission. He was still hesitating between painting and poetry, and for the time being had become deeply interested in the staging and acting of plays. Finally, the public ado about 'Werther' had shown him that he might well lean heavily, but must not lean too heavily, on his own personal experience. So he made the first part of the story, up to Wilhelm's love-affair with the actress Mariane, frankly autobiographic. After that it is a fictitious narrative in which the real Goethe, in his actual relation to persons and places, is hardly ever discernible. The making-over of the tale into 'Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship' will be considered further on.

CHAPTER V

SOJOURN IN ITALY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

TOWARD the end of his first decade in Weimar Goethe began to feel, very poignantly at times, the need of a change of scene. It was not so much that he was overworked, for of late the pressure of public business had relaxed somewhat. The particular problems that had engaged him were solved or in a fair way to solution. He had time enough, but no clear vision of what it was best to do. He was unable to apply himself to any one thing until it was finished. His poetic impulse was wayward and changeable, ever sending him off in some new direction. He was dependent on his moods and his moods were capricious. Add to this that the pursuit of scientific studies had become almost a passion; so that he was oftener minded to puzzle over some curious stone, or plant, or skull, than to work at literary projects which had no root in the living present, however much they might have interested him the day before yesterday. And so he worked fitfully at this and that, becoming more and more oppressed by a sense of something wrong—something that might perhaps be cured by a visit to the land that he had twice looked down on with longing from the summit of the Gotthard.

For ten years he had published nothing but a few short

poems, so that the outside world had no choice but to infer that he was altogether lost to literature. A writer in an 'Almanac' of the year 1781 said of him, using a simile borrowed from Lessing:

> Many years will pass before we again have a Goethe who will honor us with Berlichingens, Clavigos, Werthers, etc. Perhaps he can no longer do it. Perhaps that living spring that works its way up by its own power and shoots aloft in such copious, such fresh and limpid streams, has ceased to flow.

Meanwhile the works of his youth were circulating in pirated editions which brought him no income, were carelessly printed, and contained some things which he had now no pride in fathering. To block the piratical game he decided to issue an authentic edition of his works consisting of eight small volumes. A publishing contract was made with Göschen of Leipsic in June, 1786, and curiously enough it was stipulated that several of the works—'Egmont,' 'Tasso,' 'Elpenor,' 'Faust,'—might appear in fragmentary form if their author should prove unable to finish them. This weakness for the 'fragment' as a means of getting a subject off his mind and satisfying a publisher in the matter of space-filling grew upon him with the lapse of years and made much trouble in one way and another. He now set about the task of revision, and the temper that he brought to it may be inferred from a sentence in a letter of June 25, 1786: "I am revising 'Werther' and find that the author did ill not to shoot himself after writing it."

After spending July and August in Karlsbad, working with Herder's assistance on the revision of his first four volumes, he wrote the Duke of Weimar that he would

like an indefinite leave of absence. Without waiting for a reply, since he felt sure that his request would be granted, he stole away quietly before daylight on the morning of September 3, traveling alone and incognito and taking care to conceal his plans even from his most intimate friends. Hurrying forward by way of Regensburg and Munich he reached the Brenner Pass on the 8th, Verona on the 14th. Up to this point the careful diary that he kept for Charlotte von Stein is mainly occupied with observations on the rocks, the contour of the land, the vegetation, the clouds, the people, and their ways. He was testing the sufficiency of his scientific knowledge, proving the clearness of his eye, and wondering whether the 'wrinkles that had formed in his soul' could be smoothed out. He noted that merely doing without a servant was renewing the elasticity of his mind. At Verona the remains of antiquity and the splendors of Renaissance art began to disclose themselves and to thrill him with that joyous excitement which is the appointed portion of the well-prepared Northerner when he first sets foot on Italian soil. In our day, when travel in Italy has become so easy and so common, it is at once diverting and pathetic to follow Goethe in his wanderings, to read his notes, and to observe how his hungry soul fed and was satisfied. He wrote:

> It lies in my nature readily and joyfully to reverence what is great and beautiful. The opportunity to develop this faculty day by day and hour by hour by the aid of such glorious objects gives rise to the most blissful of all feelings.

He remained four days at Verona, visiting the amphitheater, the palaces, monuments, and galleries. The

examples of Roman sculpture that he found in the Palazzo Bevilacqua affected him deeply. After a week at Vicenza, where he was especially interested in the buildings designed by the town's famous son Palladio, he pushed on by way of Padua to the 'beaver republic' of Venice. Needless to say that he was fascinated by the witcheries of the 'wonderful island-city.' His notes, however, have less to say of Venetian painting than of Palladio's buildings, the canals, the gondolas, the ways of the people, the comedy of masks. After a fortnight's sojourn he wrote:

> Had I not taken the resolution which I am now carrying out I should have perished; so ripe had my desire become to see these objects with my own eyes.

On the 14th of October he set out for Rome, halting first at Ferrara, which he had years before pictured mentally in writing upon 'Tasso.' But its former glory was gone and so his short stay there was of little interest. At Bologna he was captivated by Raphael, and being just then occupied with the 'sweet burden' of 'Iphigenie,' which he was going to put into blank verse, he resolved that his heroine should say nothing that might not be spoken by Raphael's Saint Agatha. His notes at Bologna contain strong expressions of disgust with the ghastly and gruesome subjects affected by the early masters—always malefactors, ecstatics, criminals, or fools. 'Always a suffering hero, never an action, never a present interest, nothing to suggest a human idea.' In Florence he tarried but three hours, such was his feverish desire to reach the Eternal City. At Assisi he eagerly climbed up to the little antique temple of Minerva, but

carefully avoided the churches of Saint Francis. He had lately been traveling with a particularly benighted priest and did not wish to encounter more of the same sort.

At last, late in October, he reached Rome, the 'city of the soul.' If ever Byron's phrase expressed the exact truth it was in the case of Goethe. His early letters tell of a joy that is at times almost religious; of a desire that he had cherished for years, until it had become an 'irresistible need'; of a veritable sickness that had kept him from even looking at a picture of an Italian scene. And now the impetuous longing was satisfied—quieted for life, he opined. After twelve days he wrote that he was 'extremely happy.' The note continues:

> Every day some new and remarkable object of interest, every day fresh, great, and rare pictures, and a totality that I have long thought of and dreamed of but without attaining to the reality in my imagination.

The circumstances were highly propitious. He took up his abode with Tischbein, the gifted artist who later painted him reclining amid the ruins of Rome and meditating on the flight of the ages. Very soon he came to know Angelica Kaufmann, to whom we owe another famous portrait, a little less austere than Tischbein's. Then there was Heinrich Meyer, a Swiss artist of no great genius with the brush but an amiable soul and an expert in the history of art. Goethe liked him so well that he afterwards called him to Weimar and made of him a collaborator in matters of art. Still other German artists then wintering in Rome were Lips and Bury and the sculptor Trippel, who made the much-copied Apollo-

bust of Goethe. The artist-folk soon knew who the man was who called himself Herr Möller, but they respected his incognito. Thus he was the better able to share in their free-and-easy life without being troubled by lion-hunters.

In the morning he worked on 'Iphigenie'; in the afternoon, with Tischbein as a guide and mentor, he inspected the pictures, buildings, and monuments of the 'lone mother of dead empires.' The evenings generally went to social converse or to reading history. Gradually the difficult Roman labyrinth cleared up for him. He acquired sureness of judgment, buoyancy of mind, and knew that he was being re-born. 'Albeit I am still the same,' he wrote on the 2nd of December to the friends at home, 'I feel that I am changed to the very marrow of my bones.'

It is now time to pause a moment over the new 'Iphigenie,' which was at last completed in January, 1787, after having caused its author so much toil that he called it a 'child of pain.' The work done at this time concerned only the metrical form and the style; for the plot, the architecture, the idea, and the characters underwent no change. Up to this time Goethe had hardly done more than to try his hand at blank verse, and the difficulty that he encountered was only that which usually besets the unrimed pentameter—the danger of falling into triviality of expression or monotony of cadence. In his struggle with the meter he had at Rome the assistance of Moritz, author of the novel 'Anton Reiser,' who was something of an expert in prosody. The final result of all the labor was a euphonious, smoothly-flowing verse such as captivates the ear but lacks dramatic vigor and

swiftness. It is a verse admirably adapted to a poetic drama of the inner life.

'Iphigenie' is anything but a Greek play in the German language. The frame is borrowed from Euripides, but the picture is not Greek. Nor was it ever meant to be. One must never forget that Goethe did not belong to the order of imitators. In the making of 'Iphigenie' it was the very heart of his purpose to get rid of all the grossness, the savagery, the supernaturalism, that infect the old Greek story, and to make his characters act from motives of refined humanity. A Greek of the Periclean age would hardly have understood the play at all. In its fewness of characters, its simplicity of structure, its unvarying dignity of expression, it approaches the classic French type, but it differs from that by its greater soulfulness, its greater delicacy of psychological analysis. On the other hand, we can not say that the personages are Germans of the eighteenth century. They are of no time and place. They bear somewhat the same relation to the actualities of human nature that the Belvedere Apollo or the Venus of Milo bears to the actual human form. They are ideal conceptions, yet their ideality is nothing ethereal or superhuman; it is only human nature at its best. In Pylades alone there is something left of the old Greek shiftiness.

The heroine, in particular, while she really does say nothing that might not conceivably be spoken by a saint of Raphael, does not give the impression of a saint or an angel. She is always very human—just a good woman, capable of passion, but refined by suffering until her whole nature radiates peace. In the aura of purity and sweet reasonableness that invests her, carnal passion is

subdued, hallucinations take their flight, the sick soul recovers its health and poise. By the sheer winsomeness of her womanhood, by the artless art of just telling the truth because she can not bear to stain her soul with a lie, she so works on the barbarian king Thoas, who would fain have her for a wife, that he gives her up and lets her go in peace. According to conventional standards this is not a highly dramatic ending; and yet why should a crisis of the soul, an act of splendid self-conquest, be less effective on the stage for civilized folk than some counterfeit presentment of bloodshed? 'Iphigenie' is a noble poem for the reader and when well presented a fascinating stage-play. But the title role calls for an actress of rare gifts, and it is not surprising that the German public learned but slowly to enjoy and to value this phase of Goethe's dramatic art.

He remained in Rome until February 22, 1787, and then set out for Naples. He had been waiting eagerly for the verdict of the friends at home with regard to the new 'Iphigenie.' When it came it seemed to him rather cool; they knew and liked the earlier rhythmic prose, but could not at once adjust their minds to the novel form. It was now patent to him that 'no one would thank him for his infinite trouble.' Nevertheless he resolved to subject 'Tasso' to the same operation. 'I should prefer,' he wrote, 'to throw it into the fire, but I will abide by my determination; and since it must be so we will make a curious work of it.'

A delightful month in Naples, with repeated climbings of Vesuvius, was followed by a six weeks' tour in Sicily. On the tedious four days' voyage over to Palermo he lay in his cabin sea-sick and pondered the plan of 'Tasso.'

In Sicily, however, he took to reading the Odyssey, and this suggested a new tragedy to be called 'Nausicaa,' which soon absorbed all his literary thoughts. An interesting sketch of the project is given from memory in the 'Italian Journey,' but the play was never written.

Early in June he was back in Rome with a fresh store of inspiring memories. At this time it was his plan to stay a few weeks longer in Rome and then, before returning to his official bonds, to visit his mother in Frankfort and remain there long enough for the completion of the remaining volumes promised to Göschen. For this purpose, however, Rome was as good as Frankfort, and who could tell how long a time might prove necessary? On receiving a letter which graciously extended his leave of absence he readily decided to remain another winter in Italy. He felt the need of practice in drawing and painting, to the end that he might no longer be compelled to 'creep and crawl with his bit of talent,' but might be able to 'move freely, were it only as an amateur.' The passion of the painter was still strong within him, and it was pleasanter to occupy hand and eye with living objects than to labor over old literary projects from which he had become more or less estranged in spirit. From many a passage in his letters it is clear that he often groaned under the necessity of settling his account with the past at a time when the present was so very alluring. But something had to be done with the unfinished works.

He first took up 'Egmont,' which he had worked on intermittently between 1778 and 1782. It is probable that the manuscript which he took with him to Italy was virtually complete so far as the substance of the play is

concerned. The work to be done consisted not in the addition of new matter, but in a general revision of the style and language in accordance with his new ideas of classicity. Altho some of the scenes had been written in rhythmic prose with a distinct iambic cadence he seems never to have entertained the idea of transcribing the whole into blank verse as he had done in the case of 'Iphigenie.' The work of revision was completed in July and August, and early in September the new 'Egmont' was dispatched to the waiting critics in Weimar. It was published by Göschen the following year in the fifth volume of the new works.

Essentially, then, 'Egmont' is a work of Goethe's youth, tho its profound discussions of statecraft reflect later experience. It resembles 'Götz von Berlichingen' in having a hero who dies as a martyr to liberty, but there is no attempt, as there is in 'Götz,' to show the entire form and pressure of an epoch. In 'Egmont' there is much less variety and hardly any action at all. We may speak of a clash of wills and opinions, but it does not find expression in deeds. Egmont himself does nothing and we are obliged to take his greatness mainly on hearsay. There is little about him to suggest the victor of St. Quentin and Gravelines. One does not quite see why the populace should love him so. Goethe evidently expects us to see his hero with the eyes of Clärchen. We can understand the impatience of Schiller, who liked heroism of the Plutarchian order, over such an unaccountable hero.

Nevertheless the character of Egmont as subtly portrayed by Goethe is in its way an admirable creation. The tragic fate of the historical Egmont was due to his

remaining in Brussels in the face of danger which everyone could see except himself and in spite of earnest warnings by the Prince of Orange. His conscience was void of treason and he trusted in the justice of the Spanish king whom he had served so well. Thus in view of the appalling fate that overtook him there really was an element of fatuous blindness in his conduct. This became for Goethe the starting-point for the conception of a 'demonic' nature constitutionally averse to all sober thought and anxious concern. Thus Egmont's death does not appear to result from any isolated error of judgment, but from the very nature of the man. In literal truth his character is his fate. His character is that of a youthful favorite of fortune who loves pleasure, gayety, and popularity, lives in and for the moment, brushes aside all serious problems, and will not take thought for the morrow. His light-heartedness becomes his tragic guilt. That this was not the real Egmont Goethe was fully aware. He was not concerned with historical truth but with a conception of his own; hence he did not scruple to discard Egmont's wife and eleven children and to make him a young cavalier in love, like Faust, with a maid of low degree.

Next in order after 'Egmont' came 'Erwin and Elmire' and 'Claudine von Villa Bella,' both of which were radically rewritten in the course of the winter. The idea was to give them a classical form which would serve as an appropriate setting for the music of friend Kayser, a Swiss composer whom Goethe had now taken into his house and in whose talent he had a confidence which the event failed to justify. Regarded as literature these two musical dramas are at best only trifles which were

hardly worth the pains bestowed on their revision. The problem of a *Singspiel* wherein text and music, each worth while for its own sake, should conspire to a harmonious effect was no doubt a pretty and a worthy problem: but it was not to be solved by a mediocre musician working in partnership with a great poet temporarily uninspired.

More difficult by far was the problem presented by 'Faust.' In view of the many years that afterwards went to its completion it seems almost incredible that its author should have dreamed, in the spring of 1788, of rushing it to an end in a few weeks. But so it was. He took out the old manuscript and found that he had lost the thread of the story. The early scenes appeared to have been written 'as it were without a plan.' But he soon evolved a plan that satisfied him for the moment and then proceeded to write the scene 'Witch's Kitchen,' wherein Faust is given a diabolical love-potion. The purpose is clear; it was to account after a fashion for Faust's sudden descent from brooding philosopher to rakish libertine. On finishing the scene Goethe felicitated himself that if he should smoke the paper no one would be able to distinguish the new matter from the old. But this was an illusion. The 'Witch's Kitchen' contains elements of veiled satire and fantastic nonsense such as are quite alien to the earlier scenes.

It was evidently a part of the plan to present Faust as a fundamentally right-minded man temporarily blinded by passion and so led into revolting conduct over which, somehow or other, a mantle of charity was to be thrown. From this time on his character was to appear in a nobler light and to partake of the spiritual

growth of his creator. In the fine soliloquy at the beginning of the scene 'Forest and Cavern,' which also seems to have been written in Italy, the pensive evolutionist and grateful lover of nature is very evidently Goethe himself.

But the time was not yet ripe for the completion of 'Faust,' and the idea was soon postponed to a more convenient season. A similar fortune befel 'Tasso,' which at this time made little progress beyond preparatory studies in Serassi's life of the unfortunate poet. Having decided to leave Rome soon after Easter, Goethe was the more eager to make the most of his sojourn while it lasted. He took a keen interest in the Roman carnival and wrote a classic description of it which soon after appeared in Wieland's *Merkur*. But it was not the carnival, nor yet the ever-insistent art-galleries, that led him to write, under date of March 14, 1788, that the last eight weeks had been the happiest of his life. It was the recovery of his mental buoyancy, of his joy in life, of confidence in his poetic calling. For by this time Rome had taught him that he must renounce the ambition of becoming a painter. He felt now that he was born for poetry and looked forward to ten years of busy poetic creation. It gave him joy to find that the fire of youth was not yet extinct. And as if to complete the proof of his rejuvenation he had fallen mildly in love with a fair signora from Milan. Her name was Maddalena Riggi. It taxed his philosophy when he learned that she was already betrothed.

In the latter part of April, having paid a final visit to all the well-beloved places, he sadly took leave of Rome, recalling with sympathy the plaint of the banished Ovid. He lingered a few days in Florence, somewhat longer in

Milan. The 'fastidious Roman,' as he now called himself, could see little to admire in the Milan cathedral, but was deeply impressed by Leonardo's 'Last Supper.'

On the 18th of June he was back in Weimar, but not again to put on the harness of an official drudge. It had been agreed that he should continue nominally in the service of the state, retaining control of certain matters that came within the range of his special interest, but that he was to be relieved of his more exacting official duties. It was his purpose from now on to live for letters and for science.

But it was not so easy to keep at white heat the poetic fervor that had lately possessed him. From his Frankfort days, notwithstanding his own popular triumphs, he had felt a certain contempt for the general public, and this feeling was now stronger than ever. It was his fixed habit to write for the few intimates who would understand him; and now the old friends understood him no longer. No one was enthusiastic over 'Iphigenie,' and even the loyal Karl August was dissatisfied with 'Egmont.' Herder and the dowager duchess were now in Italy, and the once all-sufficient Charlotte von Stein was growing old and a little too strenuous in her craving for an exclusive devotion. What wonder if Weimar seemed dull and parochial? What wonder too if science—searching into the constant ways of nature—proved a stronger lure, during the next few years, than the new poetry which no one seemed to care for?

In July, 1788, Goethe made the acquaintance of Christiane Vulpius, who presently became his unwedded wife. She was twenty-three years old, fairly endowed with physical charms, winsome in her ways, and capable of

self-effacing devotion. Goethe's poetic version of the affair was that while walking aimlessly in the wood he had found a wild-flower which pleased him so much that he dug it up and transplanted it to his garden, where it continued to bloom to his great delight. He and Christiane seem to have been very happy in their quiet domesticity, tho of course Mamsell Vulpius could not be admitted to aristocratic society. Henceforth the roomy house on the Frauenplan—now the Goethe National Museum—had its private altar-fire of conjugal love. The character of Christiane has been the subject of much ungracious animadversion. On this subject a judicious modern will attach great importance to the testimony of Goethe's mother, who wrote of Christiane, after she had come to know her well: 'Such a dear, splendid, unspoiled creature of God is seldom found.'

That the lord of the mansion chose to dispense for the time being with a marriage ceremony was due no doubt—he never expressed himself explicitly on the subject—to his dislike of sacerdotal forms and pretensions. In recent years this feeling had grown with his growth. He had now completely broken with the over-pious Lavater, whom he had once admired beyond measure. His letters from Italy contain many hostile comments on the sacerdotalism of the Catholic Church. Nature was now his guide, and the mating of man and woman probably seemed to him a natural process that could gain nothing in binding quality from the blessing of a priest. That he erred in thus defying the *mores* of the time may well be granted, since he exposed his wife and children to social obloquy. In time he saw this and had his marriage solemnized in the usual way. This in 1806.

Of course the union with Christiane put an end to the old unwholesome relation to Charlotte von Stein, and for a while the lady was very angry over his defection. She could not comprehend his sudden preference of a wife at the fireside to a madonna in the clouds. To him also the rupture was painful and intensified his feeling of alienation from all that he had been before. And yet his account with the past was even now not fully settled; for there were 'Faust' and 'Tasso,' with which something had to be done in view of the contract with Göschen.

The problem of 'Faust' was quickly solved after a fashion by a decision to publish it as a fragment making no pretense to artistic finality. He selected the portions with which he was fairly satisfied, retouched the style to make it more dignified, versified the prose of 'Auerbach's Cellar,' giving to Faust the role of a taciturn and disgusted spectator, and made some other minor changes. No more new matter was added, and the final scenes of the love-tragedy were held back because the vehement prose refused to yield to the versifying process. When published the 'Fragment' of 1790 attracted but little attention from the literary world. Nor is this strange, for there was not enough of it to foreshadow the plan of the whole. It ended with Gretchen's swoon in the cathedral. A casual reader of that time may well have supposed that the new 'Faust' was to be only a modernized version of the old tragedy of sin and damnation.

The problem presented by 'Tasso' was more difficult since that was to be completed for better or worse. At one time, as we have seen, Goethe was minded to throw the manuscript into the fire. We can imagine him saying

to himself in the exuberance of his newly-restored health and spirits, Why should I torment myself over the vagaries of an unbalanced poetic dreamer whose tragedy was, if anything, that he became insane? But this mood did not prevail. Goethe had brooded so much over the subject and it was so intimately connected with his own experience, that he resolved to go ahead with it in spite of its dramatic nullity. At the time of his return from Italy not a single scene of 'Tasso' was finished. The play was his chief occupation during the ensuing year.

As finally given to the world in 1790—it is quite useless to speculate over the original plan of which there is no record whatever—'Tasso' may be described as a tragedy of separation with the tragic clouds lifted at the very end so as to open a vista of better things to come. Incidentally it is a very delicate study of mental disease resulting from the hyperesthesia of the poetic temperament. It was a theory of Goethe that the essence of all tragedy is separation, for which, as he said, 'we need neither poison nor dagger, neither pike nor sword; departure from a familiar and beloved situation under more or less of constraint being a variation of the same theme.' In accordance with this idea the whole play is constructed so as to lead up to the poet's enforced departure from his beloved Ferrara. This is the tragic catastrophe. To quote Goethe's own words: 'The painful emotion of a passionate soul drawn on irresistibly to an irrevocable banishment permeates the entire drama.'

But for the reader or spectator of the play this emotion is not at all the heart of the matter. How could it be in a world where men are continually moving from one place to another, breaking old ties, and forming new

ones? It is impossible to see a terrible fatality in a poet's changing his residence because of an amorous indiscretion. It only *seems* tragic to Tasso, just as the loss of a toy may *seem* tragic to a child. And indeed Tasso *is* a child—endowed with poetic genius. If he is sane, if the ominous symptoms are but the signs of a nervous excitability which is curable by experience and self-discipline, then it is well for him to leave Ferrara. If he is not sane, if his going away—no matter where—will simply involve him in fresh disasters ending finally in the madhouse, then we should have a real tragedy and a very appalling one. But Goethe, with his deep-seated repugnance to all unalloyed tragedy, did not wish to hint at any such outcome as that. So at the last he lets Tasso, amid the seeming wreck of all his fortunes, clamber up on the rock of Antonio's friendship. Thus the play ends, so to speak, with an interrogation point. Its great merit is its fine portraiture of Tasso's character. Dramatic, in any ordinary sense of the word, the play can hardly be called. But any one who can suppose that it lacks interest on the stage has never seen the title role portrayed by a good actor in full sympathy with Goethe's purpose.

In 'Tasso' the passion of love appears only as a sublimated affair of worship and renunciation. There is hardly a hint in it of that earthly Eros who had lately invaded its author's house and transformed his philosophy. For that we must look to the 'Roman Elegies,' which he began to write in the fall of 1788 and published some seven years later in Schiller's *Horen*. They are ostensibly reminiscent of Rome, but the lady in the case is Christiane Vulpius. In these distichs Goethe thinks

of himself as a modern colleague of Catullus, Propertius, and Tibullus, wandering by day amid the grandeurs of Rome and at night keeping tryst with his mistress. They strike a new note in German poetry. With a pagan frankness which is refreshing or shocking according to the reader's predilection, they exploit the fooleries of the enamored state and connect them with the high matters of the intellect. Thus:

Happy on classical soil I feel a glad inspiration,
  Hear with a quickened sense voices of Present and Past,
Follow learned advice and thumb the lore of the ancients,
  Always with eager hand, ever with greater content.
Thanks, however, to Amor, at night it's a different story,
  Teaching me lessons by far better than erudite lore.
For is it not instructive etc. . . .
Thus do I comprehend the marble; I measure and ponder,
  See with a feeling eye, feel with a hand that sees.

After his return from Italy with the flesh emancipated, and so long as the antique continued to be his ruling passion, the ancient elegiac meter was in high favor with Goethe. He wrote a vast number of distichs. And indeed the form was well suited to the critical and reflective moods of a man for whom poetry tended to become an avocation, science the main business of life. It is easy to praise or blame, to comment or satirize, in distichs; quite impossible to sing or to reach the heart of the many. And Goethe was now completely out of touch with the many. Few bought or read his latest productions. And as for the scientific studies to which he devoted himself with increasing ardor in his isolation, he had for them not even the ordinary public of the academic specialist. He was obliged to tread the wine-press alone.

Groping toward a tenable theory of organic evolution, he continued his studies in animal and plant morphology, published one or two short papers, and wrote a poem in distichs to expound his theory of plant metamorphosis. It was at this time that he took up optics, with special reference to the theory of color, on which he ultimately published a bulky treatise. His great concern was to refute Sir Isaac Newton's theory of the composition of white light. It annoyed him to see what he could not but regard as a pernicious error generally accepted by the learned on the authority of a great name. Gradually he came to feel that his own great mission in life was to set the world right on the subject of color and to show up Newton as the father of a false doctrine.

In the spring of 1790 he paid a second visit to Venice, but now the old charm was gone. Where he had before seen picturesque novelty he now saw squalor, selfishness, and folly. Was this the Italy he had loved?

> Erstwhile I had a Love, and more than all else I loved her;
> Now I have her no more. Hush, and bear with the loss.

Thus he complains in one of the 'Venetian Epigrams,' which teem with ill-humor and pessimistic reflections on this and that—the babbling priests, the selfish ruling class, above all, the apostles of freedom. For by this time the Revolution was well under way in Paris and there was excitement everywhere over the ideas of 1789. Goethe did not like them. He concluded that the democratic agitators were either dupes or deceivers, the latter being mere hypocrites who were masking selfish designs behind a fine-sounding lingo of liberty, equality, and fraternity. He knew very well—none better—that the

aristocrats had much on the score against them, but he felt sure that it was not for the people themselves to find a remedy. The people did not know what they wanted or what was good for them. Help could come only from a strong man able to impose his will on all.

In short, the outlook in the great world was just then rather lugubrious for a man of Goethe's temperament. On his return in September he wrote to the Herders from Breslau:

> If you will continue to like me a little, if a few folk remain kindly disposed, if my girl is true, and my big stove heats well, I have for the present nothing more to wish for.

In 1791 a ducal theater was established at Weimar and Goethe became its director—a post which he was destined to hold for twenty-six years. With a view to providing theatrical wares such as the taste of the time demanded, and at the same time of hitting off the seamy side of the revolutionary excitement, he wrote two prose plays, the 'Grand Cophta' and the 'Citizen General.' They are decidedly his weakest productions in the dramatic form—tame as stage-plays and vacuous as literature. Two others, 'Excited Folk' and the 'Maid of Oberkirch,' were left unfinished. In 1792 he accompanied the Duke of Weimar on the inglorious invasion of France by the allied Austrians and Prussians. He heard the far-famed cannonade at Valmy and was conscious that a new epoch was dawning. The following year he witnessed the siege of Mainz by the Prussians. Many years later he gave accounts of these experiences in 'Campaign in France' and the 'Siege of Mainz.'

On the whole it is a stretch of lean years that inter-

venes between 'Tasso' and 'Wilhelm Meister.' So far as literature is concerned, the best achievement of the period is the entertaining hexameter version of the medieval 'Reynard the Fox.' It is significant of his new classicizing tendency that he should have chosen to dress up these old folk-tales in the stately dactyls and spondees of Homer—a meter quite alien to their genius. Had he undertaken to translate them twenty years before, we may be sure that he would have put them into the Hans Sachs verse which he knew how to handle so well. But his concern was no longer to make his work smell of the German soil; he was bent rather on following in the footsteps of the ancients.

CHAPTER VI

ALLIANCE WITH SCHILLER

A CHANCE meeting in the summer of 1794 led to an intimate friendship between Goethe and Schiller; a friendship that exerted a quickening influence on both of them, drew them together as militant allies, and prepared the way for what may fairly be called the great decade of German letters. In the light of what was to come it seems remarkable that they did not find each other sooner. For six years Schiller had lived at Jena, where Goethe was almost as much at home as in Weimar; so that a friendly relation would have been easy and natural if either had chosen to take the first step. But the step was not taken. At the time of their first introduction to each other—it was in the summer of 1788—Schiller looked upon Goethe as a proud son of fortune, a sort of Olympian god, who gave everything but himself, and with whom a friendship on equal terms would be quite impossible. Goethe, on the other hand, absorbed just then in his work and his reminiscences of Italy, seems to have known very little about Schiller, save that he was the author of a detestable play, the 'Robbers,' which had lately been debauching the public taste. He did not know how greatly the author of the play had changed since writing it.[1]

[1] In the author's 'Life and Works of Friedrich Schiller' this subject is more fully presented than is here possible.

And so they went their separate ways, each to a great degree misconceiving the other. Gradually, however, the course of Schiller's development had brought him nearer and nearer to Goethe's way of thinking. Notwithstanding much difference of opinion, of genius, and of temperament, they now had a great deal in common. One may guess that they would soon have drawn closer together even without the 'happy event,' as Goethe called it, which led to a first interchange of views. They had been listening to a scientific paper in Jena. As they left the room together Schiller observed casually that such piecemeal treatment of nature as the paper exemplified was rather dull business for the layman. Goethe replied that there were experts who did not like it either, and went on to explain his own view of the matter under discussion. When they reached Schiller's house they were still talking earnestly and Goethe went in to help out his argument by means of a drawing—presumably of a typical flower. 'But that,' said Schiller, 'is not a matter of experience; that is an idea.' Disappointed and feeling that all his labor had been in vain, Goethe replied that he was glad if he had ideas without knowing it and could actually see them with his eyes.

To Schiller, now a well-seasoned Kantian, it must have seemed strange enough to hear a man talk of seeing an idea with his eyes. But what of that? He had long been a warm admirer of Goethe's poetic gift, radically different as it was from his own, and just now he was eager to enlist the eminent Weimarian as a contributor to his new magazine, the *Horen*. Evidently it was worth while to understand such a man and to show that one understood him. So Schiller penned that remarkable

letter of August 23, 1794, so coolly analytic yet subtly flattering, which opened the way for further correspondence. It was an easy conquest, for Goethe was beginning to feel his isolation and to desire a wider range of influence. He replied very graciously, promising active cooperation on the *Horen,* and from that time the two men were the best of friends. So long as Schiller lived nothing occurred to cloud their relation.

The new magazine had been planned as a high-class journal of art and letters. The project had been well advertised, the enterprising Cotta was ready with the modest capital required, and a goodly number of the best writers in Germany had promised to contribute. The auspices seemed highly favorable, the more so as Schiller had had some ten years' experience in editing a literary journal. It was his purpose to avoid politics, for he had reached the solemn conviction that the pressing need of the age was esthetic culture. That and that only, he believed, could mediate effectively between the rational and the sensual side of human nature and make man truly human. The fierce excitement caused by the Revolution struck him as discreditable to mankind and ominous for the future. Hence his Utopian dream of a magazine which should divert the minds of its readers from the excitements which were making life ugly, into the serene fields of art, which alone could make it beautiful.

But the fine hopes of the editor were quickly blighted. When the journal began to appear, in 1795, it was found to be singularly uninteresting. In a short time Cotta's woful tale of canceled subscriptions began to foretell an early death. After three years of troubled existence

the *Horen* came to an untimely end and there were few mourners.

The failure, such as it was,—for after all a considerable quantity of prose and verse that is now classical was first published in the *Horen,*—was not due entirely to Schiller's misreading of the public temper. The expected contributions did not come to hand; he was obliged to take what he could get, and what he could get was for the most part hard reading for the general public. As for Goethe, he loyally supported the enterprise, but his contributions were anything but a source of popular strength. The 'Roman Elegies' offended many, and not alone the very prudish, by their pagan eroticism. Goethe was not yet great enough so that readers were minded to take his indecencies as we take those of Shakspere or the bible. The tone and form of the 'Elegies' were new in German literature, while the subject-matter made no very strong appeal even to the aristocracy of letters.

Hardly less caviar to the general were the 'Letters from Switzerland' and the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini. In the former Goethe undertook to describe his tour of 1779, but they are mainly taken up with dry scientific observations rather than with the impressions of a poet in a land of beauty. The autobiography of Cellini—goldsmith, sculptor, soldier of fortune, esthetic reprobate—interested Goethe as a remarkable picture of Italian life in the sixteenth century. To the student of that era it is indeed a fascinating book, since it takes us behind the scenes of the Renaissance and shows us what the glamor is made of. And the character of Cellini—what a curious mixture of artistic feeling,

energy, enterprise, bravery, love of kindred, with nearly all the faults that flesh is heir to! Withal the translation is excellent. But the similarity of detail soon grows a little monotonous, and the critical reader of the *Horen* who had paid his money in the expectation of high-class literary novelties may well have felt a little impatient that so much space was devoted to a translation of an old book about an Italian artisan of minor importance.

More appetizing for the public of that day were the 'Diversions of German Exiles,' a collection of stories that accorded well with Schiller's idea of using art as an antidote to politics. The fiction is that a widowed baroness has fled before the revolutionists from her estate on the left bank of the Rhine, and after much painful experience has settled temporarily just across the river. Here she gathers various old friends about her, but the domestic calm is soon disturbed by political discussion. A radical nephew who believes in the Revolution clashes with an elderly conservative—with the result that the old gentleman leaves the place in a huff. This greatly grieves the baroness because the man's wife is her dearest friend. So she reads the culprits a lecture on the sin of allowing political bitterness to invade the peace of a household and make an end of all pleasant social converse. Finally they all agree to ban politics and try to amuse one another by telling stories.

The stories told are mostly pretty poor stuff. Nearly all are old tales refurbished—tales of strange happenings that are not explained and leave the reader in a puzzle. For highly entertaining yarns they lack movement. One of them, the famous *Märchen,* with its artificial fancies, its cryptic style, and its baffling symbolism, has tried the

patience and the guessing powers of many. Some have pronounced it very fine; but at best its alleged wisdom, when disengaged from its symbolic wrappings and duly explained by those who have a talent for that sort of thing, does not appear to be remarkably precious. At any rate, the true German *Märchen* is made of no such material.

The best of the 'Diversions' is a story of renunciation—a theme which was just now striking root in Goethe's mind. We are told of a rich merchant who leaves his pampered young wife for a long absence, merely enjoining upon her that, if she must have a lover while he is away, she shall at least choose a man of solid character. She assures him solemnly that she is for him alone—nothing could shake her allegiance. But after a while idleness and boredom have their natural effect; she begins to entertain lawless thoughts and ends by offering herself to an esteemed young lawyer who has attracted her attention. He professes to be overjoyed but informs her that he is temporarily under certain religious vows. A considerable time must elapse before he can gratify her, but she herself can shorten the interval by taking upon herself one-half of his penance. She consents reluctantly and the fasting to which she subjects herself establishes a habit of renunciation which in the end saves her wifely virtue.

It was mainly the indifferent success of the *Horen* which led Goethe and Schiller to retaliate in the 'Xenia.' The public, at least certain elements of it, seemed to need chastizing for its stupidity and wrong-headedness. So they began to write satirical distichs at the expense of those persons whose opinions or conduct offered a

target. At first there was no intention to publish the gibes; it was an escapade in which they indulged for their private amusement. Sometimes one would propound the theme and the other write the verses; again one would do the hexameter, the other the pentameter; but most often, of course, any given distich is entirely the work of the one or the other. In the course of a few months they had made nearly a thousand of the distichs to which, following the example of Martial, they gave the name of 'Xenia,' or gifts of hospitality. Having undertaken to edit a *Musenalmanach*, for which verses would be needed, Schiller decided to include a collection of 'Xenia' in the volume for 1797. About one-half the number in existence were published at that time,[1] and great was the commotion they caused. Some of those hit lost their temper and replied with vulgar abuse. There was a shower of indignant screeds and of 'Anti-Xenia,' and it was two or three years before the storm fully subsided.

The 'Xenia,' then, were an affair of literary partnership. There is no way of disengaging Goethe's part in them except by the knowledge one may have of his style, opinions, hobbies, and modes of thought. The two poets agreed that neither should ever claim separate property in them, and it is just as well to leave the question of authorship where they left it. In Goethe's case the 'Xenia' would have but small biographic value, even if it were possible to determine which ones he wrote; for they deal mainly with his opinions and prejudices, and these are well enough known from other sources.

[1] The entire manuscript was published in 1893 by the Weimar Goethe Society under the editorship of Erich Schmidt.

The important fact is that they became the occasion of his alliance with Schiller, whose strength was thus added to his own. The great mass of the distichs, occupied as they were with personal pin-pricks and forgotten issues, have now lost their point. Some of them were very unjust, and a few were so carelessly chiseled as to make legitimate game for the metrical purist.

The first major work to be completed by Goethe in the period which dates from the beginning of his connection with Schiller was 'Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship,' published in 1796. Even now the novel was not finished in an artistic sense, since a continuation under the name of 'Wanderings' (*Wanderjahre*) was already in view. Comparing the 'Apprenticeship' with the earlier 'Theatrical Mission' (see above, page 78), one sees that much work had been done on the new version. The obviously biographical recollections of childhood occupy less space, trivial incidents in the story have been omitted or compressed, the style has been retouched, and considerable new matter has been added at the end.

What is most important, however, is that the original idea of the tale, which was to describe the experiences whereby a poet-actor learns to find satisfaction in the more ideal aspects of his calling, has given way to another which is larger but less definite and less manageable. The 'Theatrical Mission,' which would have come to a natural end with the realization of its hero's dramatic ambition, has become an 'apprenticeship'—a word which at once suggests a course of training for some vocation or employment. But no new vocation is presented as the goal toward which all things are tending. The meaning evidently is that Wilhelm is learning to live

by living. He is undergoing an apprenticeship to the business of life. But such a scheme has no natural end, since it is obviously the part of wisdom to keep on learning to the day of one's death.

Among novels of first-class fame there is none of which it is so difficult to give the gist in a few words. 'Wilhelm Meister' is like a stroll along the highway with frequent strayings into devious by-paths. There are adventures tame and wild. One meets a host of people whom one comes to know well—the most of them not very precious acquaintances—and one hears much shrewd comment on things in general. The topography is vague, so that the reader seldom knows where he is. The movement is very slow, much attention being given to incidents and descriptions that have no obvious connection with the apprenticeship idea. For the sophisticated novel-reader of today the book is dull reading in parts.

Like the medieval Parzival, Wilhelm is a sort of 'young fool' who goes blundering through life, seeking to gratify his desires and to develop his character; but no kingship of the Grail awaits him at the last. Nor is there any other culminating-point in his career; for his marriage to the estimable Natalie is evidently to be thought of as only an incident in his apprenticeship—like his earlier love-affair with the actress Mariane. Here and there we seem to get a hint that he is destined for some notable inner illumination, but this never really comes. What he finally learns is only that it is best to have something useful and interesting to do, and that for him the theater is after all not the thing. Will farming turn out better after his return from his wanderings in Italy? Perhaps, and perhaps not; one can

not be at all sure. This is only a way of saying that the literary interest of the tale does not turn on any specific contribution that it makes to the philosophy of life. Readers have generally been too prone to look for doctrine where Goethe only meant to portray life in certain phases of it that happened to interest him. There are many oracles in 'Wilhelm Meister,' but there is no supreme oracle. The didacticism of the book is precisely its least appetizing feature for the reader of today.

The literary model of 'Wilhelm Meister,' so far as it had any, was the English novel of Fielding and Smollett. Wilhelm is a German Tom Jones, made of a little finer stuff and endowed with a Goethean bent for all-around culture. At present the cultural novel has so lost prestige that the majority of Goethe's admirers would probably vote 'Wilhelm Meister' to be the least engaging of his major works. When the book was new, however, while it never attained to real popularity as did 'Werther,' it made an epoch in German letters by the spell it cast over the literary class. Schiller studied it with enthusiasm as it came from the press. The elder Schlegel reviewed it with warm appreciation; while the younger classed it, along with Fichte's philosophy and the French Revolution, as one of the three greatest events of the century. He saw in it the promise of a wonderful new 'poetry,' which he at first called *Romanpoesie,* or poetry of the novel, and then, by a juggle of words, *romantische Poesie,* or romantic poetry. This poetry was to be realistic in the sense of dealing with life's actualities. It was also to be universal, as revealing the whole mind of its author, whose sovran caprice was to know no law of tradition or convention. It was to combine

all the genres in one, uniting poetry, philosophy, and science.

Thus the Romanticists were moved to vie with Goethe in the production of discursive autobiographic novels. For a whole generation the wraith of 'Wilhelm Meister' haunted the minds of German fiction-writers, who proceeded to medievalize the scheme. In general they found the story too realistic, too garishly modern and banal. The modern reader's complaint is rather that it is not realistic enough, but leans too much toward the old romance of mysterious adventure.

Having now disposed provisionally of the novel that had been teasing his mind for some twenty years and reserved the continuation as a problem for the indefinite future, Goethe returned for a moment to that which the world now recognizes as his masterpiece. In a letter of November 29, 1794, Schiller had urged him to go on with 'Faust,' in which he, Schiller, saw the 'torso of a Hercules.' Goethe replied in effect that he lacked the courage for that undertaking. For the moment the new friend's encouragement produced no effect, yet it may well have formed an added incentive to poetic effort. In the summer of 1797 we find Goethe once more occupied with the 'plan' of 'Faust.' In June of that year he wrote the four fine stanzas which precede the drama under the title of 'Dedication.' The 'hovering forms' of the legend come back with a flood of memories and a mute appeal for renewed intercourse. But 'Faust' was soon laid aside for a third tour in Switzerland. The notes of this journey were afterwards badly edited for publication by Eckermann. The local traditions of the Lucerne region suggested a narrative poem

on the William Tell legend, but this was not even begun. Instead, the theme and the data were turned over to Schiller, who made a play of them.

Having in mind the needs of next year's *Musenalmanach,* Goethe and Schiller now turned their attention to the ballad. This led to an interchange of views on the nature of the epic, and of the ballad as a short epic in lyric form. From the poetic impulse thus engendered came the splendid 'Bride of Corinth' and other ballads. Out of this same soil grew the project of a narrative poem epic in style, but without deeds of high emprize and with the interest focused on humble middle-class life. In this case planning was quickly followed by execution. 'Hermann and Dorothea' was published in 1798. A hard-working youth, living alone with his parents and needing a wife, woos and wins a sturdy emigrant-girl who has been driven by the Revolution from her home across the Rhine. Such is the substance of the story which Goethe tells in nine cantos of heroic hexameter, with much embroidery and many a reminiscence of Homeric phrase—an altogether charming production of a novel kind.

The Göttingen poets, notably Voss, had written hexameter idyls recording the simple annals of the poor, and one of these, 'Luise,' was greatly admired by Goethe. He knew much of it by heart, yet he was far from imitating it. 'Hermann and Dorothea' is no idyl of love in a cottage, but rather an epic of the Revolution considered as affecting the lives of common folk. We get a picture of a little world with the great world in the background. The story might have been told, and a writer of today would probably prefer to tell it, in a

prose novelette; indeed we can easily imagine it as embedded among the 'Diversions of German Exiles.' In prose, however, it would have lacked the peculiar savor due to the sonorous antique verse, which has the effect of a subtle humor. The stately dactyls and spondees, the recurrent epithets and descriptions, the Homeric turns of expression, throw a certain artificial dignity about the personages of the story and their parochial affairs, which interlock so naturally with the dreams of the French democracy.

It has been pretty clearly made out that the local color of 'Hermann and Dorothea' was suggested mainly by the Thuringian village of Pössneck, with which Goethe is known to have been familiar. The landlord and his wife owe something to Councilor Goethe and Frau Aja, and there is just a little of the poet himself in Hermann. For the splendid figure of Dorothea, one of Goethe's most winsome creations, there was no model whose name is known; but she was evidently copied from nature in the same sense that the rest of the poem is realistic. The artistry is a sort of transfigured realism, in which nothing is quite natural, yet everything in the deeper sense true to life. All the banalities of the situation are omitted or toned down, but the contours and proportions are left intact and a gauze veil of poetry is thrown over it all.

So we see why Goethe in his old age told Eckermann that 'Hermann and Dorothea' was the only work of his own that he could still read with unalloyed pleasure. It was the product of happy moods and of a single well-sustained poetic impulse, with no flagging of the spirit, no irksome efforts to recover a lost thread. Alto-

gether blithe in its general effect, it was in no way associated with painful struggle or with epoch-making inner change. Goethe had reason enough for thinking of 'Faust' as his 'sorrow,' but only pleasant memories clustered about 'Hermann and Dorothea.'

At last, in the year 1798, the way seemed clear again for 'Faust.' By this time Goethe had come to cherish a great respect for 'clearness.' The word occurs frequently in his writings and denotes an artistic as well as a scientific ideal. Quite naturally, therefore, he looked back with a degree of cynicism on the order of ideas that had found expression a quarter of a century before in the early scenes of 'Faust.' It was a fog-land in which he had wandered for a season, seeing all things dimly. Magic and demonism; escape from the trammels of the flesh; ecstatic communion with a planetary spirit; universal experience in the company of a personal devil doing silly tricks—what had such imaginings to do with the reality of a sane man's life? He could not possibly become young again or call back the old moods and aspirations. All he could do was to return intellectually to the old order of ideas and develop it in accordance with his later insight. The new plan—part of it may have been excogitated in Italy—was as follows:

Faust should end his earthly pilgrimage in a rapt prevision of a sturdy people living on land that he had rescued from the sea. Prior to that, however, he was to be led out into 'clearness' intellectually; that is, he was to compose his quarrel with life and arrive at the conviction that after all the game *was* worth the candle. In his later frame of mind magic would appear to him, not as the gateway of any joy-bringing knowledge, but as

a network of miserable superstition which it were better to have kept clear of, standing as a 'man alone' in the presence of nature. And then he was to be 'saved' —taken to the Christian heaven, albeit he had never confessed his sins or asked pardon. Faust the evildoer was to be thought of as a 'confused' servant of the Lord, temporarily blinded by passion, but fundamentally 'good' in virtue of his 'striving,' that is, his energetic, forward-pushing nature. To sum it up: The new plan was to transform the old tragedy of sin and damnation into a modern drama of wandering in the dark, the wandering to be followed in due time by emergence into the light and the divine approval.

On these lines Goethe worked with intermittent industry during the years 1798-1801. He filled up the big gap after the midnight colloquy of Faust and Wagner, duly accounting for the compact with the devil. He versified the final agony of Margaret and began to occupy himself with what was to come after. The part of the old story dealing with Faust's marriage to Helena now began to assume pivotal importance: Faust was to be redeemed from his selfish narrowness by contact with the Greek Queen of Beauty. These Helena scenes, taken with the necessary court scenes and those concerned with the death and ascension of Faust, would swell the drama far beyond the ordinary limits; hence the decision to divide the whole vast argument into two Parts, and to leave the Second to the future along with 'Meister's Wanderings.'

Thus the project now took shape in its author's mind as a gigantic 'tragedy'—so called because it would lead up to the death of its hero—setting forth symbolically the human struggle from darkness into light. To round

out the scheme he planned an 'Epilog' corresponding to the 'Prolog in Heaven,' a 'Postlude' forming a sort of sequel to the 'Prelude in the Theater,' and a lyric 'Farewell' to match the 'Dedication.'

As already remarked, Goethe's general attitude toward 'Faust' at this period of his life was one of mild cynicism. Letters to Schiller refer to it as a 'tragelaph' and a 'barbarous composition,' and there are other slighting allusions. He saw that it could never be made into a congruous work of art according to any accepted canons. Its unity would be at best only the unity of his own development, its strata a record of different periods. If this was to be so in any event why be meticulous about its consistency? Anything might go into it—for example the 'Intermezzo,' a fantastic collection of satirical epigrams not originally intended for 'Faust' at all. The 'Walpurgis-Night,' too, is strangely out of tune with the pathos of the love-tragedy in which it is embedded. The idea of taking Faust for a lark on the Brocken was in itself good; for the early design had provided for a scene in which Faust, leaving Gretchen to bear her shame alone, should give himself up for a time to 'disgusting diversions.' In his mad rush for all kinds of experience he was to sound the depths of remorse and self-contempt. Still, a healthy literary conscience will always feel that Goethe, who had now become artistically interested in the grotesque and often disgusting folk-lore of the Brocken carnival, let his hero sink a little too deep into the dirty quagmire.

During a portion of the period that saw the completion of the First Part of 'Faust,'—it was not published until 1808, but must have been virtually finished by

1802,—the 'Natural Daughter' was also under way. This was another large design that proved refractory in the execution. Planned in 1799 after a reading of the alleged memoirs of the princess Stephanie de Bourbon-Conti, it was to have been a play of ordinary length in blank verse, setting forth the fate of a high-minded woman who had been made the victim of revolutionary intrigue. Eugenie would thus have been a sort of high-life pendant to Dorothea, and there seemed a fine opportunity to exhibit the Revolution in its disastrous effects upon the social order.

For a while Goethe worked at the 'Natural Daughter' with great confidence and enthusiasm; and then, as twice before, his theme outgrew the limits set for it. What should have been the first two acts expanded into five—as in the case of Schiller's 'Piccolomini'—and so it was decided to make a trilogy of it. Ere long, however, the ardor of composition coolèd and the project was dropped, never to be resumed. Of the contemplated second and third parts there remain only prose sketches which give no very clear idea of the dramatic development. Probably it is just as well so; for while there is much of Goethe's ripe wisdom in the 'Natural Daughter,' and while the verse is at times magnificent as poetry, it is on the whole hopelessly undramatic and unlifelike—a splendid demonstration of a theory that may be sound within limits, but will not bear pressing to an extreme.

It is the theory that art at its best must represent only the typical in human nature. To this position Goethe had been led by his excessive admiration of Greek art. What did not conform to the Greek canons of simplicity, dignity, and nobility, he regarded as more or less

bad. The local and temporal, the peculiar and individual, all vulgar actuality, had only an inferior standing before his critical tribunal. So he endeavored in the 'Natural Daughter' to present human nature in its pure essence, stript of all abnormality and accident, and at the same time to depict a group of persons whose brief traffic on the stage should body forth the spirit of the Revolution. He gave his characters, except the heroine herself, no individual names, but only titles serving to pigeon-hole them in the social order. There is nothing to indicate the time or place of the action. It is all generalized and poetized to the very utmost—mere literature in the bad as well as in the good sense of that phrase.

To propagate his views of art and hold up the banner of the antique, Goethe founded in 1798 a journal called the *Propyläen,* which kept afloat with difficulty for three years and then went the way of the *Horen.* In this new enterprise he had the assistance of Heinrich Meyer, who had now taken up his abode in Weimar, well content to place his modest talent at Goethe's disposal and to shine by reflected light. The papers published in the *Propyläen* have now but small intrinsic interest, the best of them being the novelette called the 'Collector and his Friends.' It is prosy as a story but throws interesting side-lights on Goethe's way of thinking at this period of his life. Speaking broadly, it was his view that the ancients were unsurpassable in the domain of form; wherefore the moderns could aspire to nothing better than to pour their new wine into the old bottles. In this spirit he undertook to vie with Homer by writing an 'Achilleid' in heroic hexameters. The extant verses are fine in their way, but of course they are not

Homer. Their essential savor is as modern as that of the noble elegy 'Alexis and Dora,' or that of the little masque 'Palæophron and Neoterpe.'

Temporarily, then, the broadest man in Europe had actually become a little narrow in his classicism. It looked as if the storm and stress of his own youth and the life-long apostleship of his friend Herder, from whom he had now become somewhat alienated, had all gone for naught. Art at its best was no longer the free expression of feeling or the mirror of a people's life; it was an affair of the closet, of erudition, of a highly-refined technic and a very select public—in short, a noble game to be played in accordance with conventional rules. 'In limitation the master begins to reveal himself, and only the law can give us freedom'—such is the dictum of a well-known sonnet.

It was partly in the spirit of this militant classicism, partly to increase the repertory of his theater, and partly to school his actors in the noble style, that he now translated and put on the stage Voltaire's 'Tancred' and 'Mahomet'—plays for which the German public of that day could of course have but little stomach. Naturally the initial noise of the Romantic School was an offense to him, albeit both the Schlegels admired and praised him. The elder brother in particular did effective service as a critical interpreter of his work, and as a mediator between him and the general literary public from which he had become estranged. But Goethe detested the Catholicizing drift of the time. The early signs of pre-Raphaelitism, such as Tieck-Wackenroder's 'Heart-effusions' and Tieck's 'Franz Sternbald,' were as a thorn in his flesh. It was now, if ever, that he deserved the

name of pagan. In his view of religion, as a matter of feeling and belief, he had not departed from the tolerant liberalism of his youth; but the favorite subjects of the pre-Raphaelite painters—agony and ecstasy, the distorted face, the mortification of the flesh—were to him a perversion and degradation of human nature, and therefore bad art. He preferred his Greek gods and goddesses, with their calm, free, full-orbed humanity.

The ripest and most winsome expression of Goethe's Hellenism is found in his account of Winckelmann, a man after his own heart. It was written in 1804 and 1805. Some letters of Winckelmann to Berendis, who had died in 1783 in the service of the Weimar court, had been turned over to Goethe for publication. By way of introduction to the letters he chose, not to tell the story of Winckelmann's remarkable career in a straightforward narrative, but to describe and comment on the principal factors of his spiritual development. The theory he had evolved with regard to sculpture is here applied to biography. There are no dates, no vulgar details; there is no narrative. Instead of a chronological sequence of chapters we get such headings as Antiquity, Paganism, Friendship, Beauty, Catholicism, Perception of Greek Art. It is the polar opposite of the Boswellian method and results in an ideal sketch which reveals little of Winckelmann's specific individuality, but much of the author's philosophy. A famous passage occurring in the section entitled *Antikes* may be quoted once again:

> When the healthy nature of man works as a whole; when he feels the world he lives in as a great, beautiful, noble, and precious totality; when the inner harmony yields him a pure and free delight,—then the universe, if it could itself feel,

would shout with joy over the attainment of its goal and admire the culmination of its own evolutionary effort. For why all this expenditure of suns and planets and moons, of stars and milky ways, of comets and nebulas, of worlds made and making, unless at last a fortunate man unconsciously enjoys his existence?

In the preceding review of Goethe's literary activities during the fruitful period of his connection with Schiller little has been said of the externalities of his life and nothing at all of his scientific studies. Aside from taking the waters at Karlsbad in the summer of 1795 and of Pyrmont in 1801, his traveling was confined to the Swiss tour above mentioned. At one time he planned a third visit to Italy for the purpose of collecting materials for an art-history of that country, but the operations of young Bonaparte caused him to give up that project. He continued his investigations in botany, anatomy, comparative osteology, geology, mineralogy, and optics, often visiting Jena in the interest of his researches. Withal he gave a great deal of time to the little Weimar theater, which was reopened in October, 1798, with a performance of 'Wallenstein's Camp.' The following year Schiller took a house in Weimar that he might be nearer the theater, and thenceforth he and Goethe were neighbors in space as well as literary allies and dramaturgic co-workers. But Schiller was already marked for an early death. In spite of his iron resolution and his great caution his health failed more and more. The end came on the 9th of May, 1805. It was the greatest bereavement that had ever fallen to Goethe's lot.

CHAPTER VII

MONARCH OF EUROPEAN LETTERS

The current of Goethe's life now broadens out into a calm and lordly river which nothing can any more bend from its course, albeit the winds of passion may still ruffle its surface. His conviction as to the pre-eminent merit of the Greeks remained a fundamental article of his creed, but his mind gradually became more hospitable to impressions from other sources. Amid the patriotic fervors of the Napoleonic era he kept cool, at least to outward observation, thereby making enemies whose censure has never entirely died out. Yet on the whole his prestige increased, especially after the publication of the 'Elective Affinities' and the First Part of 'Faust.' Popular he did not become even then, and never has been to this day. But among the intellectuals an ever-increasing number came under the spell of his genius and recognized his peculiar sovranty among German authors. It was now that they began to call him Meister, a name which in time gave way to the more venerable Altmeister.

With the death of Schiller the great days of the little Weimar theater came to an end. Goethe indeed continued to direct it, but he knew very well that its glory and strength had departed. To honor the memory of his friend he arranged for a performance of the 'Song of the Bell' in August, 1805, and himself wrote a noble

epilog in which Schiller is eulogized with matchless art, and the pride and joy of memory are made to 'hush into silence all the mourner's grief.' To the mighty spirit they had known so well in his daily walk and conversation is ascribed the 'youth that never fades and the courage that sooner or later conquers the resistance of the stolid world.' The poem as we know it is the result of repeated revisions and additions which were made for other performances of the 'Bell' in after years.

The opening stanzas indicate that in the summer of 1805 the Weimarians were feeling secure in the prospect of peace. And so it was. There was great confidence in the military strength of Prussia, and at the same time a very general feeling that war was an affair of princes and governments. Before the end of the year Austria had been beaten at Ulm and Austerlitz, and then came the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and the calamity of Prussia. Goethe spent the summer of 1806 at Karlsbad, occupied with scientific studies and social diversions, and returned to Weimar on the 6th of October. On the 10th the Weimarians heard the roar of cannon in the south, and the next day Prussian and Saxon soldiers, hungry and dispirited, began to stream through the town. The court-folk fled—Karl August was commanding a battalion on the Prussian side—except the Duchess Luise, who now showed that she was made of heroic stuff. She refused to go, even if she should be buried in the ruins of Weimar. On the 12th Prince Hohenlohe, the very gentlemanly Prussian commander, sent an urgent request to Minister von Goethe for leave to requisition food and firewood, but received no answer.

At daylight on the 14th the great battle of Jena began. By three o'clock the Germans were in full retreat, and by nightfall French soldiers were plundering and burning in Weimar. A squad of them entered the stately-looking house on the Frauenplan and might *perhaps* have done some despite to its owner had not the valiant Christiane intervened and bought them off with some of her silver candlesticks. Napoleon arrived on the 15th and thenceforth there was no further danger. Marshals Augereau, Lannes, and Ney were quartered for a while in Goethe's house, and there was more or less of war's inferno in the town, but its *savant distingué* was treated with all due respect. His own report, sent in identical form to a number of friends a few days later, runs:

> We live! As by a miracle our house escaped plundering and burning. The reigning duchess passed most terrible hours with us, and to her we owe some hope of future welfare as well as the present safety of the palace.

A few days later Goethe was married in church to the 'little friend who had done so much for him,' and the date of the Battle of Jena was inscribed on the wedding-rings. The marriage, however, was not a sudden freak of chivalrous feeling, but an old purpose quickly ripened by the troublous times. By this act of justice to the woman who had compromised herself socially for his sake he at the same time put an end to the equivocal status of his children. But her new dignity made little change in Frau von Goethe's life. She had small affinity for the aristocratic society to which her husband now loyally tried to introduce her.

For some time after the great battle Goethe was very

busy helping the friends who had suffered and trying to restore the normal order. In particular he was concerned about the University of Jena. It was well known that Napoleon did not love the German universities and that he was wroth with the Duke of Weimar. There was thus reason to fear that the all-powerful emperor would close the University of Jena, as he actually did that of Halle, and then what would become of the precious scientific collections which had long been Goethe's especial care? To avert the threatening danger a delegation visited the Secretary of State, M. Maret, then sojourning in Naumburg, taking with them a letter from Goethe to his friend M. Denon, whose aid was hoped for. A part of the letter, which was written in French, has the following import:

> Scarcely had you gone when the evils that have overwhelmed the University of Jena were brought to my attention anew by certain worthy members who conjure me to commend them to your protection. . . . At present I hope they may find you in Naumburg, and I pray you to do everything possible for them and for me. I say for me, because the institutions of Jena were in part my work, and I am on the point of seeing the labors of thirty years lost forever.

As this effort proved fruitless the Jena professors decided to appeal to M. Berthier, Secretary of War. Their petition was accompanied by a careful memorandum in which Goethe impressively set forth the manifold services of Jena and Weimar to civilization. He spoke of Wieland, the 'dean of German literature,' of good work done for science and art, and especially of the drawing-school founded by Privy Councilor von Goethe. This time the petitioners were successful. On

the 24th of November an edict was issued under imperial authority which permitted the resumption, or rather the continuance, of lectures. But the great days of Jena, the period of its brief pre-eminence among the German universities, had departed.

It was Napoleon's express declaration that he had spared the Duke of Weimar solely for the sake of the Duchess. After the collapse of the Prussian military power Karl August procured his dismissal and accepted his inevitable fate, which was to join the Confederation of the Rhine and pay the large indemnity of 2,200,000 francs. The tax was a heavy burden and Weimar was now in a sense subject to the overlordship of Napoleon; but the escape from the Prussian entanglement was not a matter of grief to Goethe, who kept on the even tenor of his way as if nothing had happened. He was now occupied with a new edition of his works to be published by Cotta of Stuttgart, and was all but submerged in his 'Theory of Color.' His diary for 1807 and 1808, tho it contains an entry for every day, has hardly a reference to the great public questions of the time. And the same is true of his letters, which touch on every subject but politics.

The famous interviews with Napoleon took place in October, 1808. The Emperor of the French, so lately an obscure lieutenant of artillery, was now at the acme of his European glory. Prussia and Austria were virtually in his power and the minor German princes comprising the Confederation of the Rhine were either the willing or the unwilling agents of his policy. His recent campaigns had increased his prestige, for the battles of Eylau and Friedland, indecisive as the slaughter was,

had been heralded as great French victories. It is true that in Spain and Portugal the gigantic autocracy was beginning to crumble, but who could have dreamed just then that the British troops operating in the Peninsula would soon become a factor of importance in shattering the power of Napoleon?

It was under such circumstances that the all-powerful emperor called a congress of princes to bask in the light of his countenance at Erfurt, where he was then holding court. They came plentifully—emperors, kings, and minor potentates to the number of two score, besides a host of generals and ministers of state. At the express request of the Duke of Weimar, whose loyalty to the Confederation of the Rhine was justly under suspicion, Goethe joined the assembly of notables and was received by Napoleon on the 2nd of October. Sitting at breakfast the busy monarch scrutinized his visitor carefully, as he was shown in, and then said, *Vous êtes un homme.* Perhaps he may have said, *Voilà un homme,* as if speaking to some bystander. In any case the much-quoted remark was a complimentary greeting at the beginning of an hour's conversation, not a summing up of impressions at the end of it. Very likely the frank Corsican, whose business at this time was largely with blue-blooded ephemerids and sycophants with axes to grind, meant to express his honest pleasure at meeting a distinguished author who shone by his own light and was no man's satellite. On learning that Goethe had translated Voltaire's 'Mahomet,' Napoleon pronounced it a bad play in which the conqueror of the world made a sorry exhibition of himself. Then they talked of 'Werther,' which Napoleon said he had read repeatedly and

about which he made a shrewd remark in the way of criticism. The talk was interspersed with jest and laughter and the two men separated with a very good opinion of each other.

At Erfurt Goethe had an opportunity to see the famous Talma in French tragedy and to compare his style with that which they had been trying to develop at Weimar. On the 6th of October Napoleon paid a ceremonial visit in Weimar, taking along his players, who gave a performance of Voltaire's 'Death of Caesar' on the Weimar stage. After the play the emperor again talked with Goethe about the drama, urging him to write a tragedy on the death of Caesar and to outdo Voltaire by emphasizing Caesar's large-hearted plans for the good of mankind. He wanted Goethe to come to Paris, where there would be a larger field for his talents, and so forth. It was all very pleasant, very obliging. A few days later came the badge of the French Legion of Honor, and he who, back in 1782, had thought nothing at all of his patent of nobility from the Holy Roman Empire, was now delighted beyond measure. He wrote to Cotta:

> I will gladly confess that nothing higher or more gratifying could happen in my life than to stand thus before the French emperor. Without going into the details of our talk I may say that no great man ever before received me in such fashion —trustfully respecting my individuality and showing unmistakably that my nature suited him.

Writers who think nothing but ill of Napoleon are wont to blame Goethe for thinking so well of him in 1808 and for taking no part with voice or pen in the subsequent effort to overthrow him. Nothing is more unreasonable, however, than to judge a Weimarian of

that day from the standpoint of a national sentiment begotten of later events. A German to the core Goethe hoped and foresaw great things for the German people; but he was not a Prussian or an Austrian and had no reason to believe that the higher interests of German civilization were anywise bound up with the aggrandizement of either of these powers. The kind of German unity that was finally effected in 1871 by the exclusion of Austria was not then in anyone's mind and would probably have seemed to him a lame solution of the problem. He had grown up under the old empire without directly feeling any bad effects from its political impotence, and had given himself freely to the service of a small state which had prospered and won a high place in the annals of civilization: why should he suppose that it would have fared any better as a member of a strong federal state? The day of federalism and nationalism had not yet come.

Add to this that Goethe looked with anxiety on the increasing influence of Russia in German affairs, and we shall have a sufficient explanation of his seeming apathy during the life-and-death struggle of the wars of liberation. He preferred to see the Germans leagued with French civilization rather than with the semi-barbarism of the Muscovites. He saw plainly enough that, while riding rough-shod over dynastic pretensions and patriotic feeling, Napoleon had let in a flood of good ideas. Not only had the French emperor been very gracious to him personally, but he had shown a generous and forgiving spirit to the Duke of Weimar. Under the circumstances opposition to the Napoleonic regimen would have been the surest way to bring disaster on

the little duchy and its ruling house, which were endeared to him by the ties of thirty years. The only sane course was acquiescence.

From the trials and anxieties incident to Napoleon's domination Goethe took refuge in hard work—pulled this way and that, as of yore, by his varied interests. Thus his works ripened slowly, with many interruptions, in a confused *Nebeneinander*. In 1807, as we have seen, he was mainly occupied with his 'Theory of Color,' laboriously repeating the optical experiments of Newton and finding it a 'thankless task to prove step by step that the world has been mistaken for hundreds of years.' By this time, however, he had formed a vague plan of continuing 'Wilhelm Meister' in a series of short stories all turning on the subject of renunciation. During the summer, while taking his usual vacation at Karlsbad, he seems to have written a few tales with that end in view. Toward the end of the year he went over to Jena to find quiet and seclusion for work. But instead of that he found the inspiration for a string of sonnets.

To while away the otherwise lonely and tedious winter evenings he resorted to the homes of congenial friends, among whom was the bookseller Frommann. One of the members of the Frommann household was Wilhelmina Herzlieb, a shy girl of eighteen whom Goethe had known casually for ten years. He liked her very much—more than was 'proper,' as he admitted to Zelter some six years later—while she seems to have looked up to him with veneration, counting herself blest to be admitted to such choice society. And then there was Zacharias Werner, who turned up in Jena at this time in the morning blush of his fame as the author of the 'Sons of the Vale' and

'Martin Luther.' The Frommann circle took him to their hearts and homes, and Goethe evidently thought well of him—for a while. Perhaps he may have regarded him as the most promising candidate then in sight for the mantle of Schiller.

It was mainly on Werner's initiative, seemingly, that these excellent folk, men and women, took to be-poetizing one another in sonnets. Curiously enough, with all his liking for things Italian and in spite of the example of Bürger and the Romanticists, Goethe seems never before to have cared greatly for the sonnet. Probably he had considered it a mere play of metrical ingenuity wherein the constraints of form must inevitably hinder the free and natural expression of poetic feeling. Now, however, he found that, for a master, this was not really so. After all, the basis of art was willing acceptance of limitations. Hence the confession of faith in a well-known sonnet of the year 1802 beginning:

> Nature and Art each other seem to flee,
> But ere we know it have composed their strife;
> Repugnance, too, has vanished from my life,
> And both, it seems, attract me equally.

For his Laura he chose the demure and all-unconscious Minna, converting *Herzlieb* into *lieb Herz* and addressing her in the impassioned language appropriate to a sonnet as

> Lieb Kind, mein artig Herz, mein einzig Wesen.

In the course of a fortnight he found that his poetic game was going too far, so he deliberately put Minna out of his thoughts.

Such a fleeting episode in the life of an elderly gentleman of fixed habits would hardly be worth chronicling at such length were it not that some persons have regarded it as the fountain-head of the 'Elective Affinities.' Their theory is that, having looked into and recoiled in alarm from the depths of potential wickedness in his own heart, Goethe proceeded to imagine a man who should not recoil but go on in his iniquity, involving himself and the girl in a tragic fate. It also pertains to the theory that this renunciation of Minna caused an enduring heartache from which the writing of the novel at last gave the needed relief. But all this belongs to the realm of literary mythology. The 'Elective Affinities' is not veiled biography but a work of the imagination strongly tinged with the tendencies of the new Romanticism.

Very evidently the heart of the tale is the life, character, and death of Ottilie. Hers is the figure most carefully studied; for her sake, mainly, the book was written. A girl of great natural refinement, with a passion for self-abnegation and the service of others, is taken into the household of an ill-matched married couple called Edward and Charlotte. The weak Edward, a sort of middle-aged Werther, falls in love with Ottilie and imagines that he can not live without her. She meets his lawless passion half-way without realizing the danger or the badness of her conduct. A divorce is arranged. Then the infant son of Edward and Charlotte is drowned by accident while in Ottilie's care under circumstances which cause her to feel that she was to blame for the fatality. Acute remorse takes possession of her and becomes a morbid obsession. She feels that she must renounce not only love but life itself. So she abstains from food, pines away,

and dies—like the medieval lady who had eaten the heart of her lover.

Such, we may guess, was the substance of the comparatively short story which Goethe wrote in the summer of 1808—a tale of a pure soul driven by a poignant sense of remorse to court the peace of death; in short, a tale of renunciation raised to the highest possible power. But it was too long for 'Wilhelm Meister,' too short for separate publication as a book. So the author proceeded to expand his novelette of Ottilie's renunciation into a full-sized novel, filling in details about landscape-gardening, architecture, and other such matters that happened to interest him just then, and inventing some subordinate characters who really have nothing to do with the story. To the new creation he gave the name of 'Elective Affinities,' thereby implying, of course, a certain analogy between chemical affinity and the workings of sexual passion. Charlotte and the Captain have an affinity for each other, but they are sensible folk in whom the will and the sense of duty prevail over the blind force that would pull them together. In Edward and Ottilie, on the other hand, the counteragent is too weak for effective resistance. Both succumb to fate, but Edward's suicide is not very convincing. Such a moral invertebrate would never be equal to the Great Renunciation.

The quasi-scientific title has always been of dubious value to the book's reputation, since it fixes attention on an analogy which is of no importance for the story. Really very little is said about the likeness of chemical affinity to sexual attraction and that little could easily be spared. But the title gave a colorable excuse for taxing the 'old heathen'—Goethe gives himself that name

in a letter of the period—with exploiting an immoral view of human nature, by teaching that men and women *must* sin even as the sparks fly upward. To this it is easy to reply that one of the two pairs behaves in a quite exemplary manner, and that wherever there is direct comment on the ethics of marriage the subject is treated nobly and with genuine moral fervor. On the whole what we get is not at all a defense of physical determinism carried over into the moral sphere, but rather an object-lesson in the tragic danger of that sort of thing. Loose views of the marriage tie were just then very common in Goethe's entourage, and he himself had been something of a transgressor. He wrote the novel as a sort of imaginative penance. It is as if he were saying: See how your affinity doctrine works in a case that I will show you.

Another product of the years 1807 and 1808 was the dramatic fragment 'Pandora,' begun at the instance of two literary friends who had asked for a contribution to their new journal *Prometheus*. In his youth, it will be remembered, Goethe had been deeply stirred by the story of the heaven-defying, man-befriending Titan. Now, however, he was no longer minded to wage poetic war against the ever-living gods, for he had come to terms with them. So, purposing to undertake something in the Promethean vein, he chose for his heroine the divine Pandora, goddess of all the gifts, who had come down from heaven to be scorned by Prometheus and taken to wife by his brother Epimetheus, to whom she had borne two daughters, Elpore and Epimeleia. And then she had disappeared and the Great Welfare somehow depended on her return. 'Pandora's Return' was the orig-

inal title of the deep symbolic poem which was to body forth certain views of life. Was it to be the return of Peace to a war-distracted world, or a return of the Beauty that had been lost with the glory of Greece, or was the goddess of all the gifts to prepare the way for some kind of new Golden Age in the life of man?

As only one act was finished—one act in which Pandora does not yet appear—it is quite impossible to answer these questions satisfactorily. The wisest readers of Goethe differ radically in their interpretation of 'Pandora.' This is in itself evidence enough that, whatever the mark aimed at may have been, he did not hit it in the exposition. Notwithstanding all the lyric splendor of the choruses one reads 'Pandora' with a certain bewilderment. Probably it was Goethe's consciousness that his symbolism was carrying him too far from the solid earth into the blue void of abstraction that caused him to lose interest in the theme. Had he really felt that an important part of his message to mankind could best be conveyed by means of the cryptic symbolism of 'Pandora' he would certainly have finished it. He had time enough.

The year 1808 saw the publication of the First Part of 'Faust,' which had been virtually finished six years before in accordance with the plan sketched in the preceding chapter. Now for the first time it was possible for an attentive reader to get an inkling of what the author of 'Faust' was really driving at. The 'Fragment' of 1790 had left the plan and spirit of the poem quite in the vague. There was the legend, with which everybody was familiar, and the natural inference from that was that Goethe's hero was riding for a fall like

his legendary prototype; in other words, that he was to be sent to hell for his sins, more especially for his betrayal of Gretchen. Now, however, came the 'Prolog' with its clear intimations of the outcome. It was henceforth patent to all who read with their eyes open that the new 'Faust' was not to be a repetition of the familiar tragedy of sin and damnation. The Devil was not to triumph in the end.

There was still room enough, to be sure, for a rigid moralist to quarrel with the philosophy of the poem and to tax its author with holding lax views on the subject of sin and punishment. But what no one could deny or resist was the marvelous power of the poetry. Here was at last something utterly incommensurable with aught that had gone before in the whole history of the world's literature; a vast design of many-sided interest; the Divine Comedy of the modern man.

To turn from 'Faust' to the 'Theory of Color' is to pass from Goethe at his best to that part of his life-work which is now most negligible. The laborious researches in optics which were given to the world in 1810 are now seldom read by specialists in that field, because they contain nothing of recognized value in the history of the science. He performed a vast number of experiments, sparing neither time nor toil in his efforts to find out the exact facts of color-sensation, but it was not given him to contribute anything of note to the explanation of the facts, either on the physical or on the psychological side. The modern science, built up largely by means of mathematical processes of which he knew not even the humblest rudiments, has traveled a road that he could scarcely have imagined. What he did in the fields of botany

and zoology was at least in the direction, so to speak, of coming developments. But it is not so with his work in optics. There he struck off on a path of his own, and the scientific world has from the first declined to follow him.

He came to the study of color originally by way of his interest in painting. What were the laws governing the sensations produced by the juxtaposition and the blending of colors, and by the distribution of light and shade? In short, what was color? Going to the books for instruction he found them all teaching, on the authority of Newton, that color is, so to speak, a fragment of light; in other words, that sunlight is decomposable into the seven prismatic colors, and that these colors and certain groups of them can be recomposed into white light. When he undertook, however, to combine any group of prismatic colors with a view to getting white light, the result was never the pure white of freshly fallen snow, but always a shade of gray—a momentously different thing, it seemed to him. So he came to the conclusion that Newton either had not observed correctly or had perverted the truth by passing off gray for white. Evidently the whole pretended science of color was nothing but a tissue of error. It would be necessary to begin anew and treat the subject as if nothing were known about it. And the first thing needed was a body of careful observations which might serve as a basis for a sound theory. To this work he addressed himself. He was fully conscious of his weakness in mathematics, but he thought that mathematics had nothing to do with the subject and might even befog it by filling the mind with preconceptions. It was all a matter of seeing and telling

the truth about the thing seen—something he believed he could do as well as another.

Very soon, however, he found that observation and theory must inevitably go hand in hand. So he proceeded to work out a theory—as early as 1793, when he was as yet a mere tyro in observation,—which he never afterwards radically modified. The main points of it were that sunlight is the 'simplest, most homogeneous, most indivisible entity that we are acquainted with'; that it can not be composed of colored lights, since bright can never be composed of dark; that color is a modification of white light by the objects illuminated, being a mixture of 'bright' and 'dim' (*hell* and *trüb*); that the prismatic refraction or refrangibility of light has nothing to do with the causation of color, being at the most only one of its occasions.

With regard to these positions it is to be observed, first of all, that Goethe, like Newton himself, supposed light to be an attenuated form of matter. From this point of view he found it easiest to think of coloration as a process of 'dimming' (*Trübung*), somewhat as pure water is 'dimmed' by the admixture of some less transparent substance. According to the modern wave-theory the color of light, that is, the sensation of color it produces, depends solely on the rate of vibration of the luminiferous ether, and white light is a combination of all the colors in a definite proportion. Of this hypothesis Goethe knew nothing. Had anyone told him that red and violet each corresponded to so-and-so-many billions of vibrations per second he would probably have regarded that as an absurd attempt to measure the immeasurable. Perhaps he might have asked how many vibrations would

correspond to the sense of beauty. If we criticize him at all we must in fairness do so from the point of view of the old corpuscular theory. On that theory the weak point in his doctrine was his extremely vague use of the term *trüb,* which plays a very important role in his writings. It might mean almost anything from the lightest of gray, through all the prismatic colors, to black.

The treatise of 1810 consists, first, of a ' didactic part,' in which he set forth his theory, fortifying it with an immense number of observations which he had been making during a period of some twenty years. Aside from the fact that his prisms did not give him a pure spectrum the fundamental accuracy of these observations has not been called in question. Then follows a ' polemic part,' in which he hammers away industriously and often vehemently at the Newtonian hypothesis, which he regarded as the fountain-head of all error. Gradually he came to think of himself as a valiant knight besieging a rickety old castle which a deluded world still persisted in thinking of as a habitable edifice. Finally, there is a ' historical part,' in which he writes the history of speculation with regard to the nature of color. This is today the most useful and interesting portion of the treatise. Its breadth of view, its clearness of exposition, its honest praise of honest effort, its interspersed reflections on the progress of knowledge—all this is beyond praise.

With the ' Theory of Color ' off his hands Goethe next turned his attention to the autobiography known as ' From my Life. Poetry and Truth.' This was his chief occupation during the turbulent epoch of Europe's final grapple with Napoleon. The great events of 1812 and 1813 hardly disturbed the quiet tenor of his way. Like

the author of 'Peter Schlemihl,' only for a different reason, he felt that the time had no sword for him. In the first place, the sword was not his affair. He hated war, hated the fierce passions begotten of war; and he had no inspiring vision of a countervailing good that was to come from the frenzied conflict. He believed that Napoleon was too strong to be overthrown; that it were better for the present to make the best of the ineluctable. It is often said by modern German writers that his great mistake was in underestimating the power of an aroused German patriotism. But did he err so egregiously? Could German patriotism have won the Battle of Leipsic without the aid of Russia? And what would have happened to German patriotism at Waterloo had it not been for the British troops under Wellington?

For later generations the seeming apathy of Goethe during the so-called wars of liberation has been the subject of much controversy. The best men of that time, however, even those who were themselves in the thick of the fight, found nothing to criticize. It seemed to them that in quietly attending to the work which was *his* in virtue of his genius, the work which no one else could do, he was making the best contribution that he could make to the cause of the higher German patriotism. Thus Arndt, an indefatigable fighter, wrote of him in 1814, speaking of those who had deserved well of their country in the then recent struggle, that 'one towered so high that he stands as a divine miracle. This is Goethe, the poet, not born of time, but on the one hand a symbol of the German past, and on the other a symbol of its future.' In a similar vein Schelling wrote reminiscently that 'Germany was not orphaned, not impoverished, but

spiritually great in all its weakness and disintegration, so long as Goethe lived.'

And after all he was less indifferent than he seemed. While assigned by fate and temperament to the role of a passive onlooker, he shared the aspirations of the age and hoped that its trials might prove the birth-pains of a better time to come. Strangely enough he even had his moods in which he, of all men in the world, succumbed to the jingo illusion according to which the citizen of a small and weak state is to be commiserated. This appears from an oft-quoted conversation with Professor Luden, who reports him as saying in 1813:

> A comparison of the German people, politically so decadent and helpless, with other peoples excites painful emotions which I try to surmount in every possible way, and in science and art I have found the wings by which I am able to rise above them; for science and art belong to the world and national boundaries vanish before them. But the consolation they afford is after all a sorry comfort and does not make up for the proud consciousness of belonging to a great and strong nation that is feared and respected. In this way there is consolation in the very thought of the German future. I cling to it as strongly as do you. Yes, the German people promises a future, has a future. The destiny of the Germans is not yet fulfilled.

The first three parts of 'Poetry and Truth,' each comprising a volume in five 'books,' were published respectively in 1811, 1812, and 1814; the fourth part, written desultorily in the intervening years, not until 1833. The story ends with the year 1775, and no doubt many a reader has wished that it had been continued farther. In return for an authentic account of those first ten years in Weimar one could cheerfully accept a less ex-

pansive treatment, here and there, of episodes elaborated in the twenty books that the world knows. It should in fairness be observed, however, that the title does not promise and that Goethe never purposed a complete and orderly autobiography. It was to be an extract 'from my life' and to consist of poetry and truth.

The 'poetry' is not to be understood as in any sense synonymous with fiction or deliberate invention. For Goethe poetry was not the antithesis of truth, but a higher kind of truth—the fact as seen in its relations and its meaning. He thought and was quite right in thinking that to see things thus, that is, to select, ignore, combine, interpret, distribute the emphasis of light and shade, was to use the creative imagination, in other words, to 'poetize.' He once said to Eckermann: "I called the book 'Poetry and Truth,' because, in virtue of higher tendencies, it rises above the domain of low reality. A fact of our life has not value because it is true, but because it is significant." That all the multitudinous facts narrated in 'Poetry and Truth' are really 'significant' in any one definable sense would be too much to affirm: something must be pardoned to the natural discursiveness of an elderly story-teller who is looking back on his youth through the romanticizing haze of time. In general, however, the things recorded do have their 'meaning' in that they throw light on the character and development of the author. 'Poetry and Truth' is the natural history of a mind as shaped by heredity and environment.

It is the first book of its kind in the German language —perhaps one should say in any language. The 'Confessions' of Augustine and of Rousseau are fascinating

self-revelations, but neither gives the natural history of its author's mind. Goethe writes as serenely, as dispassionately, as if he were describing the life of some curious plant or animal. It is not an apologia, not at all a riot of the ego. He seems to be calmly scrutinizing himself under the microscope and candidly telling us all about the phenomenon. No doubt he did find the subject interesting, but why should he not? The whole age was paying him boundless homage. In advertising him to the world in her famous book of 1813 as *le plus grand poète de l'Allemagne* Madame de Staël did but reflect, as in most other matters, the current opinion. How had it all come about? On what meat had this poetic Caesar fed that he had grown so great? Such questions clearly deserved elucidation, and the best way to elucidate them, at least for one who held that the poetic process at its best is inexplicable for the intellect, was to tell the story of his youth, that the world might know what manner of man he had been and how his early works had originated.

The memoir is written in a placidly flowing narrative which shows Goethe's later prose style at its very best. This applies more especially to the first three parts; the fourth part exhibits here and there the signs of a waning spontaneity. In describing his distant childhood he was able to profit by his deceased mother's reminiscences as imparted to her deeply interested girl-friend Bettina Brentano. Bettina came to Weimar in 1807 at the age of twenty-two, well prepared to become Goethe's adorer. She told him what his mother had said about him, and he worked it into 'Poetry and Truth,' perhaps not entirely unaware that it was more or less mixed up with the fond fancy-work of the two intermediaries. For his

student life at Leipsic he had his own early letters to the home circle. After that there were but few of his own letters that had come back into his hands or were anywise accessible. He thus had to rely mainly on his memory, and his memory occasionally played him false in minor matters of chronology. He had not the modern *Goetheforscher's* passion for exactitude and would certainly have been amused could he have foreseen all its operations. Taken all in all, however, the tale of positive error in 'Poetry and Truth' is neither very long nor very impressive.

Finally, what most distinguishes 'Poetry and Truth' from all other autobiographies is the exceeding frankness with which the author discourses of his early love-affairs. A procession of sweethearts—Gretchen, Annette, Friederike, Lotte, Lili, besides minor flames that receive less attention—saunter through his pages, irradiating them with a mellow light of romance. As a matter of sober fact there was nothing highly exceptional in the number or intensity of these amatory agitations of adolescence. They belong to mother Nature's regimen ever since man was created male and female. What is exceptional is that an illustrious man of sixty should have chosen to write them up for publication. For readers of a certain temperament this violation of the conventional reticence has always been a stumbling-block. But let the poet be accorded his rights. He had set out to write the natural history of his mind, and his youth had fallen in a curious epoch of emotional effusiveness. How could he portray the epoch so well as by telling the truth poetically about the women he had loved?

CHAPTER VIII

SENEX MIRABILIS

RARELY in the history of letters does old age present so winsome a picture as in the case of Goethe. That which captivates is not so much the record of literary achievement, notable as that is, but the eager and indomitable spirit that informs the work, and the mountain air that seems to invest the worker. It is especially in the last ten years of his life that he deserves the title put at the head of this chapter.

During the terrible campaigns of 1813 the Weimarians, placed between two fires, had been fated to fight on one side and pray on the other. When the besom of war again swept over the Thuringian land, after the Battle of the Nations had shown that after all the Corsican was *not* invincible, Goethe bore his renewed private afflictions with grim stoicism. In due time came the capture of Paris by the allies. When the news reached Weimar there was joyous cannonading which lasted all day long. Goethe's diary calmly records the fact, but the language betrays no beating of the heart.

It was a perfectly natural tribute to the foremost poet of the nation, but an error of judgment nevertheless, that just he should have been asked to write the text for a musical festive play to be given in Iffland's theater at Berlin in honor of the home-coming victors. He took the matter very seriously, as we can see from his letters,

and hoped to rise to the occasion. He had time enough, too, for the performance had to be postponed until the first anniversary of the capture of Paris. But the 'Awakening of Epimenides' was not a great popular success.

Epimenides is intellectual Germany. At the rising of the curtain the Muse introduces him in pensive *ottava rima*. He tells in pregnant blank verse how the gods had once put him to sleep and then, on his waking up, had given him the choice between seeing the Present and seeing the Future. He chose the Present. Now appear a band of genii who bid him sleep again. In the course of his long slumber there is a symbolic clash of armies, the demons of War, of Cunning, and of Subjugation operate about him variously with song and dance, and Faith and Love take part. Finally he awakens to find that the old order has all passed away. What he sees about him seems at first a chaos of ruin; but he now has the gift of seeing the Future, and what he sees is full of promise. He apologizes for sleeping so long: it would have been better to suffer with the fighters, for 'you are greater than I am.' It is all a pretty piece of symbolism, but not very stirring and rather too finely wrought—too literary—for a telling *Io triumphe*. That sort of thing was not in Goethe's line. And yet, the final chorus is a splendid burst of patriotic feeling. After all, the note was not entirely alien to his lyre.

After Waterloo the Congress of Vienna rewarded Karl August for his services; for he had broken away from Napoleon as soon as he dared, and in 1814 had commanded a corps in the Netherlands for the Grand Alliance. He was now raised to the rank of Grand Duke

and given considerable new territory. But even during the congress, where he was present in person, he aroused the suspicion of the princes by his liberal views. He protested against the restriction of debate to the rights of rulers and pleaded for some attention to the rights of the people. As Grand Duke he at once gave his little realm a liberal constitution—the first German prince to scent the morning air of constitutionalism. Freedom of the press was decreed and new opposition journals at once began to make trouble. There ensued a period in which Weimar, now the acknowledged 'mother of arts and eloquence' in Germany, became hardly less renowned as a nursery of political liberalism.

All this was not much to Goethe's liking. That government should aim at the welfare of all the people, rather than at the power, comfort, and convenience of a ruling class, is a maxim which he would have accepted heartily. But he had no faith in majorities, or in the machinery of constitutionalism, or in the shibboleths of democracy. It is quite wrong to think of him as narrowly bent on his own ease and temperamentally opposed to whatever might disturb it. He simply felt that the business of governing was a vocation for the expert; a matter of devotion, wisdom, and humane idealism. He himself was a tireless worker. He hated the oppressive Metternich regime, but on the other hand he could see no hope in the pow-wowing and voting of the inexpert. To quote once more an oft-quoted saying of his:

> As to the principle of preserving that which is and forestalling revolution I agree with the monarchists, only not in respect to the means of so doing; for they call to aid stupidity and darkness, I intelligence and light.

He was made chief minister under the new regime, and now it irked him that his expert proposals for the good of the land were to be subject to the critical scrutiny and interpellation of any casual sausage-maker whom admiring constituents might send up to represent them.

To a man of such liberal-conservative temper the year 1817 must have been particularly trying. It was the time of the famous Wartburg festival. As the third anniversary of the Battle of Leipsic and the three hundredth of the posting of Luther's theses drew near, plans were made by the Jena students to celebrate both jubilees together at the Wartburg. The liberal Grand Duke readily granted the use of the castle and in due time some five hundred students came together to demonstrate for Protestantism, Freedom, and the Fatherland. There were speeches and hurrahings, also a big bonfire in which certain reactionary writings were consumed with fervent heat. Any government not hopelessly benighted would have looked on the whole affair as a harmless if not commendable ebullition of young idealism, but that was not the view taken of it in Berlin and Vienna. There it was regarded first with suspicion, then with alarm as exaggerated reports magnified it into a treasonable conspiracy. Protests began to rain in on the luckless Grand Duke, with demands for repressive action. So violent was the tempest that Goethe shut himself up from society in sheer disgust.

Had common sense such as his prevailed at that time in the counsels of the Confederation Germany might have been spared some disgraceful pages of her subsequent history—those that deal with her silly fear of the students' societies and her witless persecution of liberal-

minded professors. But the Holy Alliance was literally scared out of its wits. The murder of Kotzebue in 1819 brought matters to a crisis. A central commission was created to smell out academic 'demagogy.' Prussian and Russian students were forbidden to go to Jena and a strict censorship of the press was established.

All this came close to Goethe, since he had long detested Kotzebue even while humoring the popular taste by giving his plays rather frequently on the Weimar stage. In 1817 Kotzebue had returned to Weimar as a high-salaried Russian agent and had begun the publication of his reactionary *Wochenblatt,* which was the more immediate cause of the hostility that led to his death. Left alone he would have secured no following and done no harm; murdered by a fanatic of liberalism he was worth a mine of gold to the reactionaries. Thus Goethe may well have felt with the distracted Tybalt: 'A plague on both your houses!'

In the year 1817, too, that long and laborious directorship of the Weimar theater came to its inglorious end. The trouble grew out of a difference of opinion as to whether the Temple of the Muses would or would not be permanently desecrated by the appearance on its sacred boards of an itinerant showman with a trained dog. There was certainly need of some philosophy. On the one hand, the director, as author of 'Faust,' was on record to the effect that 'even a wise man is fond of a well-trained dog'; and yet he was now opposed to the dog. On the other hand, the sovran ruler of the land, liberal here too, and instigated by a mistress who liked to make trouble for Goethe, could see no harm in the dog. Result: the director was quietly relieved of his

official burden. There was a slight and brief estrangement between the two men, but they soon forgot it and remained the best of friends until the death of Karl August in 1828. For Goethe the relief from theatrical cares came none too soon. He had long since done his work in that field and it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to hold up his private banner of the ideal in competition with the far better equipment of the larger cities.

At this point a few words may fitly be devoted to some of the other personal relations that threw their lights and shadows over the afternoon of Goethe's life. With Wieland, who died in 1813, he remained on a cordial footing to the end, and his noble obituary tribute is a classic of its kind. With Herder it was different. The aging Herder had no sympathy with his friend's paganism, so that the intimacy of the 'eighties gradually cooled off. The consequence was that Herder's death in 1803 left no void in Goethe's life. When he came to write of him in 'Poetry and Truth' his pen was guided altogether by the critical intellect.

The two most intimate friends of his later years, those to whom he gave his confidence most freely, always addressing them with the familiar *du,* were the Berlin composer, Zelter, and the faithful Knebel. Of the original Weimar group Knebel alone survived him. Among his numerous scientific and literary correspondents the brothers Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt were probably worth most to him in the long run. Beginning in 1796 he gradually resumed neighborly relations with Charlotte von Stein and continued to write to her occasionally until her death in 1827.

Of the younger generation of writers, the so-called

Romanticists, only Tieck and Schelling continued to enjoy his lasting friendship. Originally the Schlegel brothers were his fervid apostles and his relations with them were cordial. He even put their vacuous plays on the Weimar stage. Then Friedrich turned against him, becoming a high priest of the Nazarenism which Goethe detested, and finally going over to the Church of Rome. This step Goethe referred to as an attempt to 'smuggle the Devil and his grandmother and all their malodorous train back into good society.' Of the elder brother too he gradually lost much of his good opinion, but without a complete rupture of intercourse.

As we have seen, he was for a while very cordial to Zacharias Werner, but when Werner became a Catholic priest there was an end of all friendly relations. He responded in a genial fatherly way to Bettina Brentano's worshipful attentions, but his few authentic letters to her, written between 1808 and 1811, give no hint of any such ardor of feeling as is imputed to him in her famous book 'Goethe's Correspondence with a Child.'

As for the literary work of the Romanticists he for the most part disliked it, especially their unplayable dramas. He could not abide their cult of formlessness. He quite failed to divine the genius of Heinrich von Kleist, and ruined the 'Broken Jug' by an unfortunate arrangement for the stage. As the later Romanticists went in more and more for the gruesome and the uncanny he came to feel that the Romantic was just a synonym for the morbid. But first and last he learned a great deal from them, as we see from the Second Part of 'Faust.'

But while he remained intellectually a Protestant his

feeling for the medieval church and its votaries underwent a great change in his later years. In the summer of 1814 he paid a visit to his birthplace, which he had not seen since 1797. He had long cherished the wish to feast his eyes once more on the old familiar scenes, but each year the pull of Karlsbad proved the stronger. Even the death of his mother in 1808 and the settlement of her estate had not drawn him back to the old home. Thus the visit of 1814 was a memorable event. Wiesbaden agreed with him, he was in buoyant health, the Rhineland spoke to him with familiar voices at every turn, and a large circle of friends were lavish of hospitality. His letters show that he was very happy.

It was on this tour that he made his pilgrimage to the chapel of St. Rochus at Bingen. The church had fared badly during the war and now they were going to rededicate it and restore its wonder-working saint to his former glory. Goethe attended the festival, along with many thousands of the faithful, was deeply impressed by what he saw, and proceeded to write a very sympathetic description of it. More than that, he sketched a picture of the saint, had his sketch drawn in crayon by Meyer, and this in turn painted in oil by Luise Seidel. In due time he presented the painting to the church. A startling new role this for the 'old heathen!'

A little later he spent two delightful weeks at Heidelberg as the guest of Sulpiz Boisserée, a Catholic art-lover who was just then full of plans for completing the Cologne cathedral. Boisserée, who had gathered a fine collection of Lowland art, now set about winning Goethe over to a more sympathetic attitude toward early Christian painting. And he was quite largely successful.

When he got back home Goethe wrote to Knebel that he was learning to be more tolerant of individuals. Nevertheless he still preferred Homer.

By this time he was deep in the study of Persian poetry, which he had begun in 1812 in Hammer-Purgstall's translation of the 'Diwān' of Hāfiz. Here he found a poetic brother with whom he could clasp hands across the abyss of time and space. He began to make himself at home in this new world of thought, feeling, and expression and found it very fascinating. On the scholarly side he took the matter very seriously, learned a little Persian and some Arabic, and soon amassed considerable Oriental learning, which was in due time utilized for the notes and excursuses of the 'Divan.'

But what proved most diverting—an excellent refuge from the distresses of war in Europe—was to imagine himself in the place of those Persian and Arabic confreres; to steal their apparatus, so to speak, and put it to his own uses. So he practised thinking in terms of the tent, the turban, and the camel,—the rose and the nightingale were familiar already—and ere long felt quite at ease in the new costume. Presently the plan took shape in his mind of a Western 'Divan' to match that of Hāfiz.

Hardly had this idea germinated when there swam into his ken a lady who was peculiarly fitted to play Suleika to his Hatem, as he now took to calling himself. This was Marianne Willemer, the young and talented wife of an elderly Frankfort gentleman. The Willemers had been prominent among the friends who made the summer of 1814 so very pleasant that he was glad to repeat the visit to the Rhineland the following year. Frau Willemer could sing and it soon turned out that

she could also write verse with the genuine Sapphic glow. She too quickly acquired the Persian apparatus, and then she and Goethe began to be-poetize each other like a pair of Iranian lovers. It was good sport, with enough of real feeling to give it a spice of naughtiness—as if two kindred Occidental souls had eloped together to the land of the bulbul. In the summer and fall of 1815 the rimed missives flew to and fro between Hatem and Suleika, forming a cryptic record of their doings and agitations; to some extent also of their religious differences, for Suleika too was a Catholic.

In this way came into being the 'Book Suleika,' by far the best of the twelve books published in 1819 under the title of 'West-Eastern Divan.' Not till half a century later did it become known—the discovery was made by Herman Grimm—that a number of the poems of the collection, including some of the very best, were from the pen of Marianne Willemer.

Taken as a whole the 'Divan' suggests a poetic Indian summer. The glow of feeling is replaced by the mellow radiance of reflection—reflection, too, on far-away matters suggested by reading. The appeal is not to the universal human heart, but to the imagination of a select few. The poems do not seem to well up from the deep springs of communal feeling, but are piped in, so to speak, from a distant land to which the writer has fled, like any Romanticist, for a refuge from the here and now. This, however, is far from saying that they are artificial or were not truly felt at the time. The German adjective that best hits their pervading quality is *sinnig*. Goethe is here a traveler on a foreign beach, picking up curious shells and comparing them with those

of the homeland. In short, the poems of the 'Divan' are the souvenirs of an excursionist, the by-products of an intellectual conquest; and such things gradually lose their power over the emotions. Hence it was that he could say to Eckermann in 1827—there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the report—:

> I noticed this evening that the songs of the 'Divan' no longer concern me in any way. Both the critical and the passionate element have ceased to live in me—left lying by the wayside, like the cast-off skin of a snake.

Between 1815 and 1819 a second edition of Goethe's works, this time in twenty volumes, came from the press of Cotta, bringing to their author the sum of 16,000 talers—a very handsome revenue, considering that the copyright was to extend only to the year 1823. The new edition contained an additional volume of short poems, the most of which had not been published before, but nothing further of 'Faust,' of 'Wilhelm Meister,' or of the autobiography. By this time 'Poetry and Truth' had receded into the background of his interest and all thought of carrying the story beyond the year 1775 had been definitely given up.

But he knew very well that his subsequent career would be of great interest to the public and to posterity and he felt a certain obligation to complete the record as best he might. What he could do and did was to write an authentic account of important episodes here and there, such as the Swiss tours of 1775 and 1797, the sojourn in Italy in 1786-1788, the campaign in France and the siege of Mainz in 1792-1793, and the visit to the Rhine region in 1814. Besides these he wrote a sort of skeleton

retrospect—a bare record of fact—which he at first called 'Annals' and afterwards by the untranslatable name of *Tag- und Jahreshefte*. These end with the year 1822.

In order to have a convenient medium of publication for his reminiscences and his opinions of men, books, and works of art, as well as for occasional poems, he started in 1816 a journal called *Kunst und Alterthum*. The first two numbers were mainly taken up with what he had lately seen in the Rhineland, including the St. Rochus festival. Succeeding numbers appeared at irregular intervals until 1832, the last volume having been brought out by friends after Goethe's death. The volumes contain an amazing variety of matter and are especially valuable for their reviews and appreciations.

And then there was also the field of science, in which the indefatigable worker felt that he had much to say. To meet this need he began to issue the publications called *Zur Naturwissenschaft überhaupt* and *Zur Morphologie*. Both began in 1817 and ran until 1824, each finally comprising two volumes of scientific miscellanies in the fields of botany, comparative anatomy, geology, mineralogy, optics, and zoology.

Amid all these austerities of strenuous toil the aging poet remained, as of yore, highly susceptible to the spell of the 'eternal womanly.' In the summer of 1821, while taking the waters as usual at Karlsbad, he made the acquaintance of a young girl of fifteen, Ulrike von Levetzow, whose mother he had already known for several years. The following summer he saw much of the Levetzows—there were three sisters in all—and was captivated by the demure girlish charm of Ulrike, who

had lately come from school and had never read a line of him at the time of her first introduction to His Excellency the Minister. He came to the point of making her an offer of marriage—not directly but by the Grand Duke as intermediary. But Ulrike declined on the ground that she might prove a disturbing element in His Excellency's household. For Frau Christiane was now dead, and August von Goethe, the poet's energetic and capable but somewhat bibulous son, had married an aristocratic court lady, Ottilie von Pogwisch, who was now the mistress of the house. There were also two grandsons, Walter and Wolfgang, whose tragi-comic fate it was to be to pass rather glumly through life under the shadow of their grandfather's great name. No wonder that Ulrike, whose heart had not been touched in the least by her elderly wooer, was shy of becoming his wife. Having now to practise his favorite virtue of renunciation, Goethe rose to the occasion and expressed himself in the splendid 'Marienbad Elegy,' which he copied carefully with his own hand in Roman script and preserved in a red morocco cover tied with a silk ribbon.

We come now to that singular production in which a lax literary conscience, combined with the exigency of Cotta's printing-house, made perennial trouble for Goethe's admirers. When he finally returned, in 1820, to the long-neglected 'Wilhelm Meister' he had on hand half a dozen or more short stories, of which some had already been published wholly or in part. These tales had no connection with one another and no common character. Originally, to be sure, it had been intended that they should all bear somehow on the subject of renunciation, which was to be the central and unifying

idea of the entire narrative. But as time passed new stories had been written with little or no regard to the central theme, and now all these were somehow to be woven together and at the same time interwoven with the tissue of a didactic romance relating to Wilhelm Meister and his friends.

As for Wilhelm himself, he had been thought of as a wandering member of a sort of League for Mutual Improvement. He was to go about with his son Felix, making new acquaintances, getting new ideas, and occasionally writing to his friends, hearing from them by letter, or meeting them in unexpected places. Never was he to spend more than three days under one roof, never to halt at a distance of less than a league from his last place of shelter. A passage in his first letter runs:

> My life is to be a wandering. I have singular duties of the wanderer to perform, peculiar trials to undergo. How I smile, oftentimes, when I read over the conditions imposed on me by the League and by myself. Many of them are being observed, many violated; but in the act of violating them this sheet of paper, this evidence of my last confession and absolution, serves me in place of a commanding conscience and I return to the track. I am careful and my mistakes no longer tumble over one another like the waters of a mountain stream.

Now it is clear, and must have been clear to Goethe from the outset, that such a peripatetic scheme of life—without a vocation, with no fixed ties save those of memory, with no responsibilities save those of a father with a son to educate—might be well enough adapted to inculcate the one virtue of renunciation, but would inevitably blight every other virtue and lead to nothing but a narrow, self-centered, intellectual hedonism. So Wil-

helm, who by the nature of his being could learn nothing except by experience, was to find out that man is a social being. Just as his apprenticeship had taught him that a vocation is needed for the sake of its effect on the individual, so he was to learn from his wanderings that there is no perfection of the individual save in the atmosphere of social thought and action. He was to learn the philosophy of work in its larger bearings. But this is really a very simple matter—the abc of our modern way of thinking—and it is difficult to see how it could possibly be brought home effectively by any scheme of wandering; brought home, that is, to a hero of romance. It would seem that Goethe had come to feel that there was something not quite right with his philosophy of individual culture; but at the age of seventy, prior to his reading in the nascent literature of socialism, he probably felt that he had no new message to deliver.

Meanwhile something had to be done. There were those stories, there was the old scheme of the 'renunciants' as a sub-title for the whole book, and there was a beginning actually in print. With a little more work a volume would be in sight for Cotta. So he did what he had sometimes done before: he set the printer at work without knowing where he was going to come out, and trusting to the future to clear the way. The first part of the 'Wanderings' came out in 1821. Of course no one understood it, although a few friends praised the volume on account of the pretty stories and the bits of interspersed Goethean wisdom.

And then came something new. In 1822 appeared Fourier's *Traité de l'association agricole domestique,* supplementing his earlier work on the 'four move-

ments,' which was now beginning to attract considerable attention. The same year brought forth St. Simon's *Du système industriel,* which was followed in 1824 and 1825 by his *Catéchisme des industriels* and *Nouveau Christianisme.* About this time also Robert Owen's socialistic experiments in Scotland and in Indiana were attracting attention and the *Westminster Review* was founded to exploit Bentham's utilitarianism. All these phenomena and others in the new line of socialistic thinking interested Goethe and he began to feel that he had builded better than he knew in putting off the completion of the 'Wanderings.'

Dissatisfied with the first part as already printed, he decided to break it up and fill in the interstices with new matter. By this time he was occupied, with the assistance of his secretary Eckermann, with the final edition of his works—the famous *Ausgabe letzter Hand.* Looking ahead he calculated that the 'Wanderings' would fill about three volumes of the proper size. But when it came to the test of the printing-office the third volume proved too thin. So he turned over to Eckermann a packet of manuscript containing miscellaneous reflections and instructed him to use as much of it as might be necessary. The matter was quite irrelevant, but no more so than some of the stories and other chips from his workshop which had already found a place in the medley of the 'Wanderings.' When the last of the three volumes, thus unconscionably padded, appeared in print in 1829 the perpetrator remarked cheerfully that in a future edition Eckermann might remove some of the irrelevant matter.

It is patent that a book which came into being in such

fashion has no standing in the court of literary art. The 'Wanderings' is really not a work of art at all but a collection of miscellanies. The same might be said, however, of the bible. With all its sins upon its head Goethe's last contribution to prose fiction is precious as a record of his thinking on social reform, religion, and education.

All that remains now is to consider the culminating achievement of Goethe's old age—the finishing of 'Faust.' And here there is a very different story to tell: no compromise with the poetic conscience, no declining to the lower levels of space-filling, but clear, steady work and triumphant devotion to the supreme end of rounding out his great life-work to artistic completeness.

Back in the year 1816, a new edition of his complete works being then in prospect, Goethe had for a moment dallied with the thought of continuing 'Faust.' The 'hovering forms' had again approached him with their mute appeal, as before in 1797. But he soon put them off; the time was not yet ripe. He went so far, however, as to write out a prose sketch of the proposed continuation, setting down the details as they had lain in his mind for some forty years. The sketch was not published at the time but came to light after the opening of the Goethe house in 1885. It shows that from the first great importance had been attached to the legendary episode of Faust's marriage to Helena. The strangely matched pair had been thought of as dwelling in a castle on the Rhine. Helena was to wear a magic ring on which her corporeal existence on earth would depend. Her wonderful son Euphorion had been imagined as a wilful, capricious child who would get into trouble with some soldiers and lose his life. The grief-stricken mother would then acci-

dentally pull off her ring, and this would be the signal of her return to the under-world. After this the details, as given in the prose scheme of 1816, are somewhat vague. It ends as follows:

> Mephistopheles, who has seen all this in the capacity of an old stewardess, tries to comfort Faust by directing his attention to the charms of wealth and power. The owner of the castle has been killed in Palestine and greedy monks try to get possession of the place. Faust fights with them, aided by three mighty men whom Mephistopheles gives him as allies, comes off victorious, avenges the death of his son, and wins a great estate. Meanwhile he grows old, and what happens to him later will appear when we assemble at some future time the fragments, or rather the sporadic passages of the Second Part which have already been worked out, and thus rescue some things that will be of interest to the reader.

The assembling here promised was destined to wait about nine years longer. Actual work on the Second Part began in the spring of 1825. At that time Goethe's thoughts were much occupied with Lord Byron, who had met his death at Missolonghi the preceding year. He had long admired Byron for the power of his verse, and the famous Englishman had written him several letters and had promised, on his return from Greece, to pay a visit to the 'undisputed sovereign of European literature.' In Byron he saw a shining example of splendid genius rushing to ruin for the sake of a dazzling dream. Then too he had himself lately lived through a thrilling epoch in which he had seen German youth go mad with patriotic passion. Thinking of all this and reading books about modern Greece, which was just then the object of admiring sympathy among Philhellenes in all the Western world, he presently got a new vision of the old epi-

sode of Faust's marriage to Helena. He would transfer the scene from the castle on the Rhine to Arcadia, where Faust should rule for a brief season over the fabled land of poesy with the Queen of Beauty for a consort. Their union should symbolize the Germanic conquest of classic soil, the relation of a feudal lord to his vassals, the devotion of a medieval knight to his liege lady. And Euphorion, the offspring of their union, should be an earth-spurning Genius of Poesy, becoming intoxicated at last with martial frenzy and ending his career in a sublimely quixotic attempt to fly.

On these lines, with superb imaginative daring and a marvelous wealth of symbolic suggestion, the episode was worked out in the course of the next two years into a 'Classico-Romantic Phantasmagory,' which was published separately in 1827 with the sub-title 'Interlude to Faust.' The next year it was reviewed with keen penetration and some quite natural perplexity by Thomas Carlyle, who had now become an occasional correspondent of Goethe, having found in him his guiding star in a naughty world.

Henceforth the problem of completing 'Faust' was the problem of filling in before and after the 'Helena,' which was to take its place as the third act of the Second Part. The first two acts were written first, then the fifth, and finally the fourth. It was Goethe's habit to work at 'Faust' only in the morning hours when mind was fresh and vision clear and Dame Care could most easily be held at bay. Sitting on a hard chair, or pacing to and fro in his plain, bare study, from which pictures, rugs, statuary, and every other suggestion of wealth and comfort had been rigorously banished, he would excogitate

a string of verses. Then he would write them down in an illegible scrawl with a blunt lead pencil on any scrap of paper that chanced to lie at hand. These jottings served him for dictation to his secretary, who would make a clean copy of the day's work.

The details of the architecture are reserved for the general survey of 'Faust' at the end of this volume. There is evidence enough that the aging Goethe retained his mental vigor and his imaginative power to the very end. His prose undoubtedly degenerated with the lapse of time, becoming stiff and formal to the point of awkwardness, even in his letters. This is partly attributable to his life-long habit of dictation. Not so, however, with his verse. The most we can say is that his poet's passion for pregnant expression—which, however, is by no means exclusively characteristic of his old age—combining toward the end with an increasing fondness for the symbolic, sometimes resulted in phrases that are obscure and even un-German. This is especially the case in the final scene of 'Faust.' But there he was trying of set purpose to express the inexpressible. Taking the Second Part as a whole the verbal perplexities are no more numerous than in the First Part. And they are no more numerous in either than in many a play of Shakspere.

The summer of 1831 saw the completion of the great poem which had haunted its author's mind at intervals for sixty years. From this time forth Goethe regarded his remaining days—so he told Eckermann—as a free gift of the gods. He and his faithful secretary had seen through the press the forty volumes of the final edition of his works, for which he had secured the 'protecting privileges of the most serene German Confederation.'

But there still remained material for fifteen volumes more.

We have it from several sources that Goethe remained well and cheerful to the last. But the winter was apt to be trying for him. On the 15th of March, 1832, he took a cold which was at first not thought menacing. Two days later he wrote a long and highly interesting letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt. Not long after that he grew suddenly worse, suffering from chills and difficult breathing. The end came on the 22nd, just before noon. Of his last words there is no record that is anywise authentic. Better than the legendary ' more light,' if one wishes to sum up briefly the genius of his life and aspiration, are some verses of his dating from the year 1817:

Spacious world and life increasing,
Honest effort, never ceasing,
Ever searching, ever grounding,
Never ending, often rounding,
Guarding well the ancient treasure,
Welcoming the new with pleasure,
Pure of purpose, happy-hearted,
Well,—we get our journey started.

PART SECOND

STUDIES AND APPRECIATIONS

CHAPTER IX

THE PHILOSOPHER

By Goethe's philosophy I mean his way of thinking about the world of experience. To attempt an account of his metaphysics would be largely futile because the data are insufficient. The world beyond experience was for him the domain of religion—of *Ahnung* rather than of clear thinking. It was there for reverence, not for investigation. His nature was averse to abstract speculation. To use his own mode of expression, he did not venture to talk of the absolute in a theoretic sense. Yet he was much given to theorizing when he thought he had a basis in nature to build on. Given the right point of departure for his air-ship and he was quite capable of soaring into the ether and breathing the thin air of the unverifiable.

So it is that his writings teem with sayings in verse and in prose that trench on philosophy as the science of fundamentals. These sayings do not grow out of a consistent scheme of thought, for he was no system-maker but an eclectic who took what he could use wherever he might find it. While he profited by reading some of the great systematic thinkers, notably Spinoza, Kant, and Schelling, in the main they only confirmed him in previous ways of thinking. He was sometimes tolerant and sometimes intolerant of views opposed to his own.

It must be remembered too that many of his best dicta occur in plays and hence must be used warily as evidence of the author's real opinions. So it happens that a partisan of almost any school of thought can buttress his case on a detached citation from Goethe.

But these more or less detached sayings, often aphoristic, sometimes humorous, generally incidental to some poetic train of thought, are what we principally have to go by. His more persistent and connected theorizing comes in connection with his studies in natural science. From this mass of miscellaneous writings we have to extract his philosophy. It will be necessary to proceed with circumspection, keeping steadily to the larger aspects of his thinking and not trying to exhaust the subject in all its ramifications, lest the reader be exhausted first. In particular we must avoid hanging too heavy weights of logical inference on slender pegs of poetic fancy or passing humor.

I

In his youth the world at large presented itself to Goethe's poetic vision as energy and order. If we must have a name for his way of thinking let us call it cosmic dynamism. When Faust has his wonderful view of the macrocosm what he sees is a vast evolving system of inter-related parts no one of which is at rest. Each part is instinct with an energy that keeps it moving—moving in rhythmic relation to all the rest. By their motion the parts weave themselves into a harmonic whole. There is no room for anything inert or stagnant, and no distinction appears to be made between physical and spiritual forces. The universe is dynamic and the effort of the

dynamic process is toward the realization of an order that is coming to be. A little later Faust passes under the magic influence of the Earth-spirit, who is thought of as a personification of terrestrial energy. He is the torrent of life, the rushing storm of deeds, the surging wave, the blowing wind, birth and death, glowing life, the eternal weaver at the humming loom of time. The magic virtue that goes out from him is itself energy—a quickened sense of power, of the will to do and dare and endure, to buffet the waves and face shipwreck without dismay.

All this is poetry, not philosophy, but it points clearly enough to the idea of a vast dynamic urge embracing all that takes place on the earth and actuated by a spirit whose very character is ceaseless movement. One is reminded of the Heraclitean doctrine that all things move and nothing abides, but there is no evidence that Goethe's early thinking—the portion of 'Faust' referred to (lines 430-509) was written in 1774 or 1775—was affected by Heraclitus, or that he had undertaken to work out for himself, whether independently or with the help of later Greek speculation, the ontological problem involved in a doctrine of flux. That problem may be stated thus: If all things constantly change whereon is the change wrought? What is the underlying reality, substance, or being, in which the change is manifested?

But it were not quite correct to say that the Goethe of 1775 had never attacked this problem at all. He had certainly read about it during his long convalescence in 1768-1770, when he was grappling hard with the Neo-platonists, the cabalists, and their late-medieval progeny. In the eighth book of 'Poetry and Truth,' written some

forty years later, we have his own account of the curious cosmogony that he had extracted from his study of the mystics. Restated in greatly condensed form it was like this: In the beginning the triune Deity had created itself as a harmonious world of spirit. Then a sort of fission had occurred, sundering the creator from the created and giving rise to Lucifer as Lord of Matter. In this way conflict had come into the harmonious world, matter always pulling down and being incapable of rising to the divine. Then, finally, by a special act of grace on the part of the Elohim, man had been created as a being of a dual nature, pulling and pulled two ways at once.

That real knowledge of the world we live in could never be furthered by such fantastic assumptions, operating with inconceivable powers and processes, must have quickly become evident to Goethe as soon as he emerged from the close air of his father's library and was caught once more by the current of life. For he was dowered with a strong sense of reality. What wonder, then, if he recoiled against metaphysics, even as he sickened of talk about heaven? He had heard academic lectures on philosophy at Leipsic and must have absorbed some of the Leibnitzian ideas and terminology. But in general—so we must infer from 'Faust'—he had no stomach for the subject. Afterwards, while ill, he had very seriously sought for light in his own way and had landed in a muddle of unthinkable assumptions which explained nothing and rather intensified the darkness. Some of these mystical ideas, to be sure, the poet in him could use and did use in depicting the struggles of an imaginary searcher after light, but for the sober think-

ing mind there was no help in them. The riddle of the world was not to be solved by lonely pondering of dead men's guesses.

This recoil against speculation from abstract premises or unverifiable assumptions is expressed in many passages of 'Faust.' It is true that the arraignment usually proceeds from the mouth of Mephistopheles, but one must remember that he is only a little less Goethe than is Faust. When Mephistopheles advises the freshman to study metaphysics and goes on to describe it as a matter of trying hard to grasp what will not go into the human mind, and of letting fine words do duty for ideas—all that is just as much Goethe as are the transcendental longings of Faust.

In another passage, Faust having just set forth his wild dream of universal experience, Mephistopheles observes that this world as a whole is made only for a god—which is a way of saying that man can not possibly comprehend it. A little further on the man who speculates is likened to a bewitched animal that wanders about in the field refusing the good green pasture that lies on every hand. But there is no need of further references. The very heart of the Faust-poem, as originally conceived, is revolt against intellectualism. Its starting-point is Faust's passionate conviction that the thinking mind is unable to solve ultimate problems or to achieve happiness.

What gives interest to these ideas as recorded in the early portions of 'Faust' is the fact that in an important sense they continued to form the basis of Goethe's philosophy. That is, he remained a dynamist with respect to the phenomenal world, an agnostic with respect

to the absolute. I use the word dynamist to denote one who habitually sees the world, not as something static or inert, but as a manifestation of indwelling energy. Nothing is more characteristic, more fundamental, in Goethe than this dynamism of his. Nature is everywhere alive and at work. There is no rest, no death in the sense of final extinction or stagnation.

II

Such being his ingrained habit of mind, it is a little surprising at first that Goethe should have been so strongly drawn to Spinoza. For Spinoza's universe is anything but dynamic. As a human being the lens-grinder of Amsterdam had an eye for the concrete, but as a philosopher he took little note of particulars. The manifoldness of Nature with her contending forces, the urge and push of the cosmos, the struggles and trials of humanity, seem in his system to be submerged and lost to view in the infinite ocean of the one eternal substance. His is an inert world; at least it might be for anything explicit in his words. And then too the very basis of his thinking is confidence in logic. He never doubts that the thinking mind can read the riddle of the world. Rationality is for him at once the test and the organon of truth.

In both these respects the genius of Spinoza's philosophy is opposed to Goethe's way of thinking. Not only was *his* universe dynamic,—a shoreless fountain-ocean of force, to use a phrase of Carlyle,—while Spinoza's is placidity itself, but he had little faith in abstract ratiocination. From first to last he held that feeling and intuition are more to be trusted than logic

when it is a question of comprehending life and its processes. Long before he became acquainted with Schelling or with any theory of intellectual intuition, his way of looking at things was that of the artist, who must first apprehend with his feeling before he can comprehend with his intellect. Just as logical analysis proceeding from an attitude of cool intellectual aloofness can never explain a work of human art, that is, tell us what it really is, so he would have said that reasoning can not possibly explain the ultimate secret of nature, who is the supreme artist. The reasoner can study the artist's technic and methods, can compare and deduce and criticize, but the vital essence of the artwork, that which makes it what it is, discloses itself only to the kindled imagination. Now of all this there is nothing in Spinoza's calm geometrical reasoning. If there is anything it must be read between the lines.

Whence came, then, the attracting power of Spinoza? It will be worth while to cite Goethe's own words on that subject from 'Poetry and Truth':

> When I had sought the world over for a means of education of my singular character I came upon the 'Ethics' of this man. What I may have read out of the book and what I may have read into it I could hardly tell. Suffice it to say that I found here that which quieted my passions and seemed to offer me a large and free outlook over the physical and moral world. But that which especially drew me to him was the boundless unselfishness that shone from every sentence. That marvelous saying, 'Whoso truly loves God must not demand that God love him in return,' with all the propositions that support it and the consequences that flow from it, filled my mind completely. To be unselfish in everything, and most so in love and friendship, was my delight, my maxim, my exercise; so that that later wild saying, 'If I love thee what is that to thee?' came from my very heart. For the rest, let me

not fail to recognize here also that the most intimate unions spring from contrasts. Spinoza's perfect equanimity contrasted with my turbulent striving. His mathematical method was the opposite of my poetic way of thinking and putting things, and precisely that artificial treatment which some thought ill-adapted to ethical subjects made me his earnest disciple and excited my ardent admiration.

Not much importance can be attached to the suggestion about the attraction of opposites, a doctrine which is more a popular myth than a law of human nature. There is abundant evidence that Goethe was repelled from other men by the very qualities which he thinks drew him to Spinoza. In 'Faust' he pours ridicule on the whole business of logic-chopping and he remained distrustful of formal proof as a means of arriving at truth. Perhaps it were nearer the mark to say that he was originally drawn to Spinoza as a famous heretic whom posterity in its ignorance had given a bad name—that of an atheist and subverter of religion. When he began to read him and found out how far all that was from the truth, he felt drawn to him, just as toward Bruno and other bugbears of the orthodox. After all, the Jew philosopher was a man and a brother whom he could take to his heart.

But however one may settle the question of spiritual affinities which Goethe declared he could not settle, the passage just quoted from 'Poetry and Truth' makes it fairly clear that Spinoza's influence was more religious than intellectual. He provided a moral sedative, quieting passions that were just then much in need of quieting and opening larger vistas in every direction. Reading him was like getting the sun after a season of foggy weather on the sea. Goethe's religious nature

demanded an immanent God working from within, and such a God Spinoza gave him. He says in a poem:

> What were a God who merely stood aloof
> And let the world spin round for His behoof?
> Him it befits to dwell within, and so
> Himself in All, All in Himself to show;
> So that what works in Him from hour to hour
> May never miss His spirit or His power.

This doctrine gave him his bearings in a law-governed universe divine at every point. He also found here that which satisfied his artistic as well as his religious nature. For God-Nature appeared as the summation of the All—a Power to be studied in its ways of working by the thinking mind, imitated in its works by the creative imagination, and reverenced in its ultimate inscrutability by the religious spirit. Spinoza's 'intellectual love of God'—knowing the laws of the universe and acquiescing in them—proffered a supreme ideal of aspiration. It is not strange that he was ready to listen to a man who told him that the nature he loved and the God with whom as a boy he had tried to establish a personal relation—that these two were one; that outside that One nothing whatever was conceivable, and that of that One changeless eternal law was the very essence.

An attentive reader of Spinoza has no great difficulty in picking out the ideas that must have captivated the mind of Goethe. They were the triad of mutually interlimiting doctrines: self-affirmation, self-control, and self-surrender. The first is the law of 'persistence in one's own being' which Spinoza makes to be the foundation of all virtue. He says:

Since reason demands nothing contrary to nature, it therefore demands that everyone shall love himself, seek his own true advantage, desire all that leads a man to greater perfection, and generally, so far as in him lies, endeavor to persist in his own being. Then, seeing that virtue is naught else than acting according to the laws of one's own nature, and seeing that no one endeavors to preserve his own being except in accordance with the laws of his own nature, it follows that the foundation of virtue is this very endeavor to persist in one's own being.

The second is a necessary consequence of the struggle for that freedom which he regards as the main part of man's perfection. According to Spinoza passion is a 'confused idea' which ceases to be such when we form a clear notion of it, that is, when we understand it as a link in a chain of necessary causation. Thus the first step toward freedom is to learn to comprehend one's own being as a part of the Eternal Order which is God; for passion is subdued the moment we think of it as inevitable.

The third law grows out of the quest for happiness, which demands an infinite and eternal object of affection. It is best set forth, not in the 'Ethics,' but in the treatise on the 'Improvement of the Intellect,' as follows:

I noticed, moreover, that happiness and unhappiness depend on the character of the object to which we attach our affections. For about that which is not loved there is never any contention; there is no sorrow if it die, no envy if it be possessed by another, no fear, no hate, no disturbance of the mind whatever; all of which things happen if one loves that which can perish. But love for a thing infinite and eternal feeds the mind with a pure joy that is free from all sorrow; a thing which is greatly to be desired and sought for with all one's powers.

Under each of these heads it would be possible to marshal a goodly number of quotations from Goethe. Broadly speaking one may say that the first furnished the maxim of his youth, the second that of the middle portion of his life, the last that of his declining years. The first connects itself with his youthful emotionalism, his 'forward push,' his impulse to live as fully as possible, to develop his personality, to build up the pyramid of his existence. The second marks and grows out of his gradual recognition of the truth that all this is possible only by the partial inhibition of spontaneous impulse in the interest of a larger freedom. Self-control is a Goethean specialty. 'Whatsoever frees our minds,' he says, 'without giving us control over ourselves is ruinous.' And again: 'What government is best? That which teaches us to govern ourselves.' Not to multiply citations, let it suffice to adduce a stanza from the 'Mysteries,' where the doctrine is set forth better, perhaps, than anywhere else:

> For every power tends forward to the distance,
> To live and to be working here and there;
> And thereunto its obstinate resistance
> The Stream of Time opposeth everywhere.
> Amid this stormy, difficult existence
> The spirit hears the oracles declare:
> That thrall the universal tyrant shapeth
> He that subdues himself alone escapeth.

In connection with the maxim of self-surrender we may think of Goethe's later devotion to scientific studies carried on to the end of understanding the primal laws which, as he believed, expressed the inmost essence of the over-ruling divinity. We may think also of his long

and persistent preaching of renunciation and of many such sayings as that the whole art of life consists in 'giving up our existence in order to exist.' A passage in 'Poetry and Truth' runs as follows:

> We put one passion in place of another; employments, dilettantisms, hobbies—we try them all through to the end only to cry out at last that all is vanity. No one is horrified at this false, this blasphemous saying; indeed it is thought to be wise and irrefutable. But there are few persons who, anticipating such intolerable feelings, in order to avoid all partial resignations, resign themselves universally once for all. Such persons convince themselves of the eternal, necessary, law-governed order of things and try to acquire ideas which are indestructible and are only confirmed by the contemplation of that which is transient.

I think the totality of Spinoza's influence is best summed up in a stanza of the poem 'One and All,' perhaps the most pregnant half-dozen lines to be found in the whole range of Goethe's verse:

> Soul of the World, come and invest us!
> Then with the World-mind's self to test us
> Becomes our being's noble call;
> Good spirits lead, our way attending,
> High masters, soothing and befriending,
> To Him that made and makes the All.

III

But if one takes Spinoza's philosophy as a guide and plunges into the manifold of experience with it there is little help to be got from it. It has nothing to say as to the why or how of nature's processes in detail, gives no clue to any particular law. All possibilities are equally provided for in advance. Whatever is, is God.

It was different in the case of Kant, who began as a physicist and whose first great critique was primarily an attempt to stake off the knowable and close the door on all metaphysics of the absolute. As the 'Critique of Pure Reason' (1781) in effect undertook to prove what was for Goethe virtually a fundamental postulate one might suppose that the famous book would at once have attracted his attention. But there is no evidence that such was the case. Beginning in 1789 he certainly did occupy himself with Kant, but at that time it was the then new 'Critique of Judgment' that interested him—more particularly, it would seem, on the side of esthetic theory. Possibly too at this time, and certainly not much later, he studied an earlier work of Kant, namely, the 'Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science.' In a letter written to one Professor Schweigger in 1814 we read:

> Since our excellent Kant says in plain words that matter can not be conceived without attraction and repulsion, which means, I take it, without polarity, I am well satisfied to persist in my view of the world under this authority, in accordance with my earliest convictions, which have never seemed to me doubtful.

So it appears that in 1814 Goethe regarded the law of polarity as the all-explaining principle, the backbone of his philosophy. He implies that his own discovery or acceptance of the law preceded his acquaintance with Kant, but he was glad to have Kant's great authority for the doctrine. The phrase 'earliest convictions' must not be taken too literally. There is nothing about polarity in Goethe's early writings; the word does not come into his vocabulary until about 1792. Probably he

used the word 'earliest,' not with reference to his life or his literary career as a whole, but with reference to the period when he first took up the study of natural science and began to have 'convictions' about it. This was in the early 'eighties.

In this connection, as bearing on the influence of Kant and the date when the law of polarity first took shape in Goethe's mind, another passage, this time from the 'Campaign in France,' is of some interest. This book was got ready for publication in 1820-1822, but on the basis of notes taken in 1792. The passage is as follows:

> One can not imagine a more isolated man than I was at that time and long continued to be. The hylozoism, or whatever one chooses to call it, which I held to and whose depths I left undisturbed, made me unreceptive, nay intolerant, of that way of thinking which sets up as its confession of faith a dead matter moved or agitated in some way [from without.] I had not failed to note in Kant's natural science that attraction and repulsion pertained to the essence of matter, and that neither could be separated from the other in any concept of matter. From this I perceived the primal polarity of all things, which permeates and animates the infinite variety of phenomena.

So we see that the sum and substance of Goethe's debt to Kant, so far as he remained conscious of any debt at all, was the idea that matter is dynamically constituted, that is, endowed with an inherent tendency to move. The doctrine was formulated by the youthful Kant, before he became famous, as a logical deduction from the Newtonian law of gravitation. If there was a gravitational pull there had to be a resisting push. It may be remarked in passing that Kant himself never banked heavily on the doctrine, treating it simply as a

necessary postulate of physics. In his critical philosophy it cuts little or no figure.

But Goethe was less cautious. Not content to leave the antagonism of forces as a physical phenomenon of mass, he undertook to extend the scope of the law to the biological and spiritual realms and gradually made of it a sort of universal key to all phenomena. And yet, key is hardly the right word, since it unlocked nothing but only subsumed under one head a variety of happenings that had else seemed chaotic and bewildering. We have his word for it that he wrote his paper on plant-metamorphosis before he had read Kant at all. A passage in his notes preparatory to that paper runs as follows:

> In the progressive changes of the parts of a plant there is a force at work which only by an inexact use of words I can call attraction and repulsion. It would be better to call it x or y in algebraic fashion, since the words expansion and contraction do not fully describe it. It contracts and expands, builds out and transforms (*bildet aus und bildet um*), unites, separates, colors, decolors, broadens, lengthens, softens, hardens, imparts, and withdraws. Only when we cognize all its effects under the aspect of unity do we get a clearer view of what I have been trying to explain by all these words.

Here there is nothing about attraction and repulsion, which of course did not fit the case of plant-growth. Instead we find the antithesis expansion and contraction, and this is admitted to be inexact. The whole passage is typical of Goethe's imprecision in scientific matters. He is not looking for the physical causes of a plant's growth, or for anything that can be weighed and measured. He is seeking to understand the mind of the artist Nature. He notes that she operates in various ways,

producing different effects for which language has divers names. It seems to him a gain in clearness to regard all these effects as proceeding from one force operating variously, and to have a name for this force even if it is not a good name.

So then the Goethean doctrine is that the primal law of the dynamic world-process is a law of antagonistic forces manifesting itself as action and reaction, expansion and contraction, ebb and flow, heating and cooling, enjoying and suffering, and countless other rhythmical or pulsating movements. The action of the heart in its systole and diastole furnished him with one of his favorite names for the universal rhythm, but on the whole he preferred to call it polarity from the phenomenon of magnetism. This seemed to him to present the law in its simplest aspect beyond which the mind could not go; to be, in other words, a 'primal phenomenon' (*Urphenomen*). His idea was that the actual state of the world at any particular time is the resultant of all these multitudinous, antagonistic, rhythmically acting forces.

If the matter ended here the universe would present itself as a vast nexus of never-ending see-saws; for it belongs to the doctrine that all equilibriums are but temporary, the see-saw soon beginning again. To escape from this somewhat depressing view of the world Goethe postulated a second law, that of ascent (*Steigerung*). By this he meant an upward tendency in the pulsation such that, while everything recurs rhythmically, it does not come back to the precise point where it was before, but to a point a little higher. He calls this brace of laws, polarity and ascent, 'nature's two great mainsprings.'

In general he held that the former operated in the material realm, the latter in the spiritual; but that each sometimes crossed the border, so to speak, and worked in the other's domain. To quote his exact words from a comment he wrote in after years on his friend Tobler's aphoristic essay 'Nature,' written in 1782 and at first supposed by some to be Goethe's own work:

> But as matter never exists and operates without mind, or mind without matter, matter is capable of rising, just as mind clings to the power of attracting and repelling.

In his essay on plant-metamorphosis he observes that as we pass upward from the root there is a progressive 'refinement of juices,' from node to node, each 'filtering' them and passing them on in a purer form to the next. That is, for example, the calyx has coarser juices than the corolla. In general, plant-metamorphosis is described as a 'process of progressive ennoblement, such that everything material, lower, commoner, is gradually left behind, while the higher, the spiritual, the better, makes its appearance in greater freedom.'

The law of ascent, that is, the upward tendency of the recurrent pulsations, Goethe found best figured as motion along a spiral curve. Spiral movement, accordingly, plays a role in his nomenclature. But just as his notion of polarity is vague and elastic, so his notion of ascent. It corresponds to such unmeasurable concepts as ennoblement, spiritualization, refinement. In chromatics it is something which converts blue or yellow into red, or tinges the sunny side of an apple with a deeper hue. Only as to the rising scale of animal organisms does it take on a measure of scientific clarity. On

this subject he says, anticipating Spencer's law of progressive differentiation:

> The more imperfect a creature is, the more its parts resemble one another and the whole. The more perfect it becomes, the more dissimilar its parts. . . . The more the parts resemble one another, the less they are subordinated among themselves. Subordination of the parts indicates a perfect creature.

IV

What has just been said relates to the mode of nature's operation. But however we simplify the dynamic process the ontological problem remains. What is the raw material, so to speak, which Nature actuates with her two mainsprings? Is matter force? Are life and mind derivative? If we say no, then what becomes of the world's oneness? If we say yes, what then is the primal entity? Such questions as these must either be laid on the shelf with Kant, who consigned them to the limbo of the unknowable, or else they must be answered provisionally by a metaphysical assumption.

At this point Goethe diverged somewhat from Kant and seemed to find what he wanted in Schelling's philosophy of nature. In Schelling's scheme the world-process is the world-soul gradually becoming conscious of itself. Its analog is the self-conscious human ego which knows itself directly and not by any process of logical reasoning. The theory of intellectual intuition harmonized very well with Goethe's artistic temperament. He had always believed in a way that the artist's divination offers a better key to the world-riddle than the reasoner's logic. It was pleasant to hear that this very doctrine was the latest word in philosophy.

The essential part of Goethe's ontological creed, his theory of types, had been worked out before Schelling began to write, and worked out by the very intuitional method that Schelling stood for. The theory was a form of subjective idealism on a basis of metaphysical agnosticism. Dismissing the ultimate nature of matter and mind as an unsolvable problem, recognizing the unthinkableness of creation and the inscrutableness of the absolute, yet clinging tenaciously to the monistic point of view, it assumed that what we actually see going on in the world is the evolution of types. The type is the primordial and permanent factor, all else being flux. Such an archetype he called an *Urbild*, a 'primal form.' But this primal or archetypal form had no objective existence, never being perfectly realized. It was only a figment of the world-mind, the mental pattern by which God-Nature had chosen to work. Hence he often used the name 'idea,' that is, a form seen by the mind's eye. A particular form seen by the physical eye is always a copy of the archetype, but never a perfect copy—always more or less modified under the operation of the laws of polarity and ascent.

Thus morphology in the broadest sense, that is, the doctrine of forms, became for Goethe the fundamental science. The object of his quest was to comprehend the actual form of manifestation as related to the archetypal idea. His method was to scrutinize the visible forms of nature for the purpose of divining the idea, and then to observe in detail how the idea was bodied forth—approached, departed from, concealed, modified, but never completely lost sight of—in the world of actuality. He applied his method in botany, zoölogy, geology,

chromatics, and meteorology, but I shall not now follow him into the details of his speculation. We are here concerned only with his philosophy, his general way of thinking. To my own mind the most interesting question arising from his scientific studies is that of his relation to the development hypothesis—whether he is really to be counted among the forerunners of Darwin or not. That question, which involves some scrutiny of his scientific labors in general, is taken up in the next chapter.

V

It will now be in order to note how Goethe's fundamental doctrines of antagonistic forces, of polarity and ascent, are reflected in his general view of life and of human nature. The temporal phase of polarity is periodicity, of which he was a keen observer. Thus he remarks in 'Poetry and Truth,' in speaking reminiscently of his youthful Wertherism:

> All enjoyment of life depends on the regular recurrence of external phenomena. The alternation of day and night, of the seasons, of blossom and fruit, of whatever comes to us periodically,—these are the mainsprings of earthly existence. The more sensitive we are to these enjoyments, the happier we feel. . . . But if these varying phenomena come and go without exciting our interest . . . then sets in the greatest of evils, the worst of maladies: life itself is felt as a loathsome burden.

One is reminded of his couplet:

> Naught is unbearable in nature's ways
> Except a series of pleasant days.

A passage from his diary of the year 1780 runs thus:

> I must notice more closely my inwardly revolving cycle of good and bad days, of passions, inclinations, impulse to do this

or that. Invention, execution, arrangement, everything comes and goes in regular order—cheerfulness, sadness, strength, elasticity, weakness, calm, and likewise desire. As I am living very hygienically the regular movement is not interrupted, and I must try to find out in what period and order I revolve about myself.

This study of the natural rhythm of his being led him to conclude that there was no use in kicking against the pricks. The wise plan was not to try to 'command his poetry,' as the Director requires in the Prelude to 'Faust,' but to follow nature's leading and allow his life to alternate between the distractions (diastole) of business and society, on the one hand, and the concentration (systole) of creative effort on the other. On this subject he has an excursus too long to quote in the sixteenth book of 'Poetry and Truth.' The doctrine is put epigrammatically in a matter-of-fact stanza of the 'Divan':

> In breathing, lo, are blessings twain,
> To draw in air and expel it again;
> The one oppresses, the other relieves,
> So strangely Life her fabric weaves.

Again, life is continually conceived under the aspect of stimulus and response. We hear a great deal about action and reaction. What the individual does is his response to some stimulus offered by the world about him, which in turn reacts to his action, and so on. An interesting passage runs thus:

Our highest gift from God and nature is life, the rotary movement of the monad about itself, knowing neither haste nor rest. . . . The second favor of the higher powers is experience—the living and moving monad noticing and taking hold upon its environment, thus becoming aware of itself as in-

wardly boundless, outwardly limited. . . . The third factor in the development is the action or deed which we put forth against the outer world. . . . This action from within is immediately followed by a reaction, whether it be love seeking to further or hate to hinder.

By this 'boundlessness' of the individual Goethe means the urge of passion, desire, instinct, which tend to go on and on, like motion in the physical world, unless checked, retarded, or changed by some resisting agent. The outer world is the resisting medium which receives the impact of individual effort. His commonest name for this outward push of the individual is *Streben,* 'striving,' a favorite word in his vocabulary. 'Unlimited striving' (*Streben ins Unbedingte*) is the indulgence of spontaneous impulse without control by the will. This 'striving,' ever coming into conflict with the environment (the 'conditions' or *Bedingungen*), is the root of all virtue. It is what makes Faust's salvation possible.

Thus the individual, cribbed, cabined, and confined by the conditions of his environment, is forced by the very nature of life to struggle against them. Only so can he maintain his own being. There is accordingly no freedom except in the voluntary acceptance of limitation. Its meaning for Goethe 'is to keep oneself afloat between the extremes of spontaneous impulse and the universal moral norm, and each moment, as it were in play, to restore the equilibrium.' A line of 'Tasso' lays it down that man is not born to be free. The program of the French democracy led Goethe to a formal demonstration that equality and freedom can not coexist. 'Legislators,' he observes, 'who promise free-

dom and equality at the same time are either visionaries or charlatans.'

If life by its very nature is a conflict of opposing forces it follows that all judgments of praise and blame must be relative to the conditions. I can not arraign the law of gravitation, tho it slay me, for it makes my life possible. To condemn any man utterly is to condemn the constitution of the universe. The bad is a condition of the good, as pain is a condition of joy. There are no absolutes anywhere. The Devil, as His Majesty's Opposition, is a necessary and duly accredited factor in the Lord's government. But if all things, the bad along with the good and the ugly along with the beautiful, are part of a natural order of conflicting forces, what basis is left for approving or disapproving anything whatever?

To this question I suppose Goethe would have answered that man is not a fighting animal by virtue of his reason or his logic. He does not really know why he fights, any more than the sparks know why they fly upward or the leaf knows why it flutters to the ground. Such knowledge of ultimates is denied him. He only knows that he is born into life and bidden to live. This is to fight, the word having no other possible meaning. To refuse to fight is to refuse to live. But in fighting to maintain his own being he *must* approve this and disapprove that. Such is in part his way of fighting, and he can not do otherwise if he would. He must approve and fight for what is 'according to his own nature'—*was ihm gemäss ist.* Goethe once wrote to Zelter that 'moral progress consists in knowing that life, if it goes well, is to be regarded as a constant fight-

ing and overcoming.' Some well-known verses assert that to 'maintain oneself against all powers calls the arms of the gods to one's aid.'

But while Goethe had much to say about fighting and regarded it, in one phase or another, as the inevitable human lot, he did not as a matter of fact mean much more by it than moralists have always meant by the battle of life. His temperament was pacific, contemplative, in the main judicial, albeit he was quite capable of wrath like other sons of Adam. In his later years he laid increasing stress on the virtue of poise and so got the reputation of setting supreme value on his own serenity of mind. The Swedish poet Tegnér speaks of him as 'Goethe the all too calm.' But his attitude was the natural outcome of his whole philosophy of antagonistic forces that ever seek an equilibrium yet never find it except for brief instants of time.

The Goethean virtue of poise or equilibrium is the eighteenth century phase of the old Greek doctrine of 'nothing in excess.' It is the ideal constantly preached by Wieland, whose thinking was much influenced by Shaftesbury's conception of the perfectly balanced 'virtuoso.' Sometimes Goethe used the term 'gracioso' for his ideal exemplar of equilibrium through self-control and the avoidance of excess. This is what he meant by 'beautiful humanity,' of which he had so much to say. This is what he meant by the famous lines of the poem 'General Confession,' where men are bidden to 'wean themselves from the half and live resolutely in the whole, the beautiful, the good.'

Beyond a doubt this idea of the perfection of the individual through the symmetrical culture of all his

higher human aptitudes and the maintenance of a due equipoise between centripetal or selfish impulse on the one hand and centrifugal or altruistic tendencies on the other,—beyond a doubt this is Goethe's last and highest word in ethics. The doctrine lends itself readily to misconstruction and indeed has often been misconstrued as meaning simply, in the last analysis, a sort of sublimated selfishness. But the sage of Weimar knew very well, and in his later years was much given to urging, that the perfection of the individual was something realizable only in the give-and-take of social effort. After all, self-surrender, in the sense of devotion to large ideas that make for the good of human kind, was the overruling law of self-realization.

His doctrine of duty does not differ from that of Kant or Fichte by its less strenuous demand or its more hedonistic tinge, but by its underlying assumption that the categorical imperative itself was made for man and is to be viewed relatively to human perfection. A man does not do his duty because God commands it, but because he chooses to do it in the interest of his own highest welfare. Bondage to duty, he would have said, is no better than any other bondage, and the only duty consists in 'loving that which one enjoins on oneself.' Naturally, therefore, he would have rejected the transcendental state with its imperious claim to blind service and blind self-sacrifice. According to his way of thinking the state exists for man, not man for the state. Nowhere does he admit any higher criterion than the perfection of man, who must seek his highest good in the sweat of his brow, by toil and moil, amid a never-ending conflict of antagonistic forces.

Never-ending shall we say? It was a pious belief of Herder that the cosmic conflict would at last come to a permanent equilibrium in a transcendental City of God. This unthinkable thought was certainly no essential part of Goethe's philosophy, but it was not alien to his moods of mystic longing for peace. Witness the lines:

> From everywhere streams joy of life,
> From greatest star and tiniest,
> And all the pressure, all the strife,
> Is the Lord God's eternal rest.

CHAPTER X

THE EVOLUTIONIST

I

The merit of Goethe as a man of science has been much debated. The literature of the subject is mainly the work of men of letters or men of literary leanings, but a number of eminent scientific specialists have also contributed to it. Thus, to mention a few notable names from the generation contemporary with Darwin, we find Helmholtz, Virchow, Du Bois-Reymond, and Haeckel all on record as to the relation of Goethe to the doctrine of evolution. Helmholtz wrote in 1876:

> To Goethe belongs the great glory of having first foreseen the leading ideas toward which the sciences of organic nature were tending, and by which the subsequent development of those sciences has been determined.

Six years later, in an address before the fifty-fifth congress of German naturalists and physicians, Haeckel rated the scientific merits of Goethe very high, declaring that he could see 'no essential difference' between Goethe's philosophy of nature and 'our modern monistic philosophy as re-established by Darwin.' On the other hand, Du Bois-Reymond, in an address delivered on assuming the rectorship of the University of Berlin in

1883, took the ground that for a man of science Goethe's mental equipment was defective in one important particular, namely, the sense of mechanical causation. He argued that Goethe's views were essentially different from the Darwinism of our, or rather of that, day, and that what he did in a scientific way was at best of small moment and would hardly be missed if it were stricken from the record. In short, Du Bois-Reymond would have had the world remember that the poet Goethe was a man of science in much the same spirit as it remembers that Frederick the Great was a poet.

Now it is plain that there are two questions here. One relates to the general merit of Goethe as a scientific worker, the other to the nature and extent of his evolutionism. The former is a question for scientific experts, the latter a question for any one who chooses to study the data bearing on the subject and to interpret them according to their most probable meaning. Speaking for myself as the humblest of laymen in natural science, I incline to the view of Du Bois-Reymond with regard to the first question. For it does not appear that Goethe's work in any scientific field whatever notably affected the course of subsequent investigation. Yet this is the only possible test of merit in the history of science. To show that a famous poet or philosopher of long ago had in his head, by free gift of the gods, ideas which were afterwards established on a firm basis by the labors of other men may be an interesting literary diversion, but it is hardly anything more. The great man in the history of science is the one who fructified the minds of other men.

Now Goethe never did that—never 'made school',

or set anything going outside his own mind. Botanists say that his work has been of little use to their science. His discovery of the intermaxillary bone in man, while a genuine discovery for him, had been anticipated. He was not the first to recognize the homologies of the vertebrate skeleton. Modern optics is nowise indebted to his 'Theory of Color,' while geology and meteorology have gone their way as if he had never lived. If we seek a reason for this sterility of his scientific labors we have not far to go. It was not so much that he lacked patience for the 'dead work' of science as that he lacked interest, as Du Bois-Reymond says, in mechanical causation. The science of our day is concerned with the explanation of phenomena as directly caused by antecedent phenomena, and no other kind of explanation is deemed worthy of the name. But Goethe cared little for mechanical causation. His sufficient cause was the mind of the world-artist, his pursuit the idea. His theory of types is unworkable because of its vagueness. One can not get forward with it. Finally, his two great laws of polarity and ascent, so far as they are laws, are a description rather than an explanation.

But with all this admitted it is still worth while to look somewhat carefully into the nature and extent of his evolutionism; for while his standing as a forerunner of Darwin is debatable, there can be no doubt whatever that he *was* an evolutionist in a quite legitimate sense of the term. Furthermore, his evolutionism, while it has made little difference in the history of science, made a great deal of difference in the history of his own mind and art. It affected his imaginative work to some

extent and is vitally bound up with his general way of thinking. As for his work in chromatics, we may think all that away from the sum total of his activity, and what remains would still be Goethe. Not so with his evolutionism.

The main object of this study is to assemble the data bearing on the subject, that they may tell their own story.

II

As we have seen in Chapter IV, Goethe's active concern with science began with mineralogy, which soon came to interest him mainly for its bearing on broad questions of geologic theory. His diary and correspondence show how eagerly he applied himself to the new pursuits imposed by his responsibility for the Ilmenau mines. He visits all the nooks and crannies of the little state in order to study its geologic features. He begins a collection of minerals and tries to impart his enthusiasm to his friends. Wherever he goes we find him knocking at the rocks and returning laden with treasures. 'I am now living body and soul in rock and mountain,' he writes in September, 1780, 'and am delighted with the broad prospects that are opening before me.'

By 1782, as appears from a letter to Merck, he begins to feel something of assurance with respect to his knowledge of geology. Shortly after this botany and comparative anatomy begin to claim a portion of his time, but his interest in his former studies continues unabated. In 1784 he makes a journey to the Harz Mountains and keeps what he calls a 'geognostic diary' of his travels. He prints nothing in the line of geology, however, until 1807, after which we have a considerable

number of short contributions. Some are mere notes, others are book-reviews, while still others are descriptions of the geologic features of the Karlsbad region and other localities that he had visited. The only interest they have now is in their incidental deliverances with regard to geologic theory.

Right at the beginning of his studies Goethe had accepted the erroneous doctrine of Werner that granite is the foundation of the earth's crust, and that other formations are always of later origin, having been superimposed on the granite in the form of deposits from a primeval *menstruum*. This theory he soon came to look on as impregnable, so that granite acquired for him a quite peculiar sentimental interest. In letters of the period he refers to himself as a 'friend of granite.' A fixed belief in the primordial character of that rock established itself as an underlying assumption in all his speculations concerning the sculpturing of mountain masses. There is a curious fragment of his, written probably in 1784—a sort of prose ode to granite. A part of it reads thus:

> Sitting on a high and naked peak and gazing over a wide expanse, I can say to myself: 'Here thou reposest immediately on a foundation which reaches down to the deepest places of the earth. No recent layer, no heaps of *débris* washed together by the water, have ever deposited themselves between thee and the firm ground-floor of the primeval world. Here thou dost not, as in those beautiful and fruitful valleys, walk over a continual grave; these peaks have never begotten and never swallowed up any living thing; they are before all life and above all life.'

With such ideas in his head as the basis of all geologic wisdom he naturally sided with the Neptunists

when the famous controversy of the eighteenth century broke out. The evidence seemed to him conclusive that nature's process in shaping the hills had always been a quiet and leisurely process. To this conviction he clung tenaciously and finally gave it expression in 'Faust,' where the Devil speaks for the Plutonists while Faust champions the other side:

> When Nature in herself her being founded,
> Complete and perfect then the globe she rounded,
> Glad of the summits and the gorges deep,
> Set rock to rock and mountain steep to steep,
> The hills with easy outlines downward molded,
> Till gently from their feet the vales unfolded.
> They green and grow; with joy therein she ranges,
> Requiring no insane, convulsive changes.

It was Goethe's way to work to the utmost an idea that had once taken possession of him. Extending the scope of his geologic doctrine he soon came to believe that nature's characteristic method is always quiet and leisurely—a method of gradual transformation without breaks and without barriers. This idea became one of the ruling doctrines of his life, furnishing him not only with a starting-point for scientific study, but also with a rule of conduct and a criterion for judging the actions of men. He hated the Revolution because it was a sudden and violent upheaval. In short, reverence for the method 'without haste but without rest' became the key-note of his character.

Like the rest of the Neptunists, Goethe was of course aware that volcanoes and earthquakes were facts in nature; he contended, however, that such agencies must always have been what they appear to be at any par-

ticular epoch, namely, something sporadic and exceptional. His notion, curious as it sounds when stated, seems to have been that violent commotions were not a part of nature's process but interruptions of it. In 1788 Werner claimed an aqueous origin for basalt and Goethe regarded the case as made out. Some of the 'Xenia' are at the expense of the Vulcanists, whose cause he thought lost beyond retrieval. It was thus a source of great mental disturbance for him when, in the early years of the nineteenth century, catastrophic theories more or less similar to those advocated by Hutton began to win influential friends. The new views, as accepted by Von Buch and Von Humboldt in Germany and by De Beaumont in France, ran counter to his inveterate prejudice. It was like telling him that mother Nature was after all unsteady and subject to freaks. The matter interested him deeply. It is often referred to in his letters and minor prose writings and is woven into the texture of the Second Part of 'Faust.' Each side is represented there by its appropriate champion, but the Vulcanist doctrine is given a slight tinge of burlesque and persiflage, whereas that of the Neptunists is evidently meant to be taken more seriously.

The colloquies in 'Faust' are on the whole serene enough, but Goethe could not always maintain his serenity when dealing with this topic. In an outburst penned not very long before his death he vociferated:

> Be the case as it may, it must be written that I denounce this accursed racket of the new order of creation [that is, the noisy argument of those who would make nature's orderly work a product of tumult and explosion]. Surely some young man of genius will arise who will have the courage to oppose this crazy unanimity.

This bold and confident prediction from an octogenarian poet is in itself rather striking as an evidence of the man's character, but it becomes still more remarkable when we remember that at the very time when these words were being penned by the exasperated Altmeister the 'young man of genius' was on the way. Sir Charles Lyell's famous book, which ushered in the new era of bit-by-bit geology, appeared in 1832.

The great controversy of a hundred years ago has now only a historical interest, the advance of knowledge having rendered much of the earlier speculation untenable on both sides. All the problems are stated differently now. The ideas of Goethe were certainly far from those of our time, yet it is interesting to note that he was nearer to them than the most of his contemporaries. He had started from a false theory and much of his reasoning was wrong in detail; but so excellent were his powers of observation and so perfect was his intellectual balance, that he was able to reach conclusions which, to some extent, have stood the test of time.

But was not this anticipation largely fortuitous—just a lucky accident which was thus and might have been otherwise? That it was hardly so but an honest triumph of the scientific imagination appears probable when we pass from the general to the particular and consider his prevision of the coming importance of paleontology and his theory of a glacial epoch. 'The growing importance of the history of organic remains,' wrote Sir Charles Lyell, 'may be pointed to as the characteristic feature of the science of geology during the present century.' In view of this fact no small interest attaches to a letter written by Goethe to Merck October 27, 1782.

In this letter he sets forth his theory as to how the bones found in the alluvial plains of Europe came to be there and argues that they belong to a recent epoch which is, however, in comparison with our ordinary computation of time, 'prodigiously remote.' Then he adds: 'The time will come when men will no longer jumble together organic remains, but will arrange them with reference to the world's epochs.'

This might seem a small matter and from one point of view so it was. Goethe himself never followed up the idea and so far as he was concerned nothing came of it. But it is a little remarkable that such an idea should have been in his mind at that time, since it does not seem to have been in any one else's. Cuvier and William Smith were boys of thirteen, and the older geologists, regarding their science as the handmaid of biblical orthodoxy, were content to see in fossil remains at once the work and the evidence of the Noachian deluge. When one reads what nonsense men of ability were at that time still capable of thinking, Goethe's isolated idea begins to look like a mental achievement of some dignity.

His relation to the glacial theory may be quickly described. He early speculated about the erratic boulders of Germany and in time seems to have accepted the view of his friend Voigt that they had been floated in from the north on icebergs in the time of the primeval ocean. Toward the end of his life, however, we find him in possession of a different theory to the effect that long ago, at a time when North Central Europe had been covered with deep water, an epoch of 'great cold' had set in, and that the phenomena of glacial action had then manifested themselves on a large scale in Germany. This

idea is first recorded in a passage of 'Wilhelm Meister's Wanderings' which is known to have reached its final form in 1829. It is also formulated in an essay entitled 'Geologic Problems and their Solution,' first printed in 1833.

Thus we see that Goethe was dreaming of primeval ice-fields at least a decade before Agassiz, attracted by the work of Charpentier, built his lone hut on the Aar Glacier and began the series of investigations which resulted in opening up so many a new vista in modern geology. Both Charpentier and Agassiz acknowledged the priority of Goethe in this line of speculation.

III

Let us now follow the history of his thinking on the development of living forms. The starting-point was in the exigencies of horticulture at Weimar. In 1782 we find the busy poet-minister reading the botanical writings of Rousseau and 'taking a taste' of Linné. In 1785 he is examining seeds under the microscope. About this time Linné becomes his 'daily study'; he exerts himself to master the Linnean terminology, and a compendium of the great Swedish naturalist's system accompanies him on all his travels. In the summer of 1785 he spends several weeks at Karlsbad and there, in the society of helpful friends, his botanical studies make good progress. One day he comes on an area covered with the *drosera* and is led to make further observations on the 'irritability' of plants. But, as might be supposed, these studies were at first little more than the 'analysis' of plants and flowers. The science consisted in dissecting a flower and ascertaining what Latin name Linné had seen fit to

give it. In this procedure he complacently claims to have acquired some skill, but he was not enthusiastic about it, for the reason, as he shrewdly remarks, that 'cutting up and counting did not lie in his nature.' In this same connection he observes, without explicitly making the opinion referred to his own, that 'we were often compelled to hear the objection that the whole science of botany, to which we were so devoted, was nothing but nomenclature; that it was a system built on numbers, imperfect at that, and as such could satisfy neither the understanding nor the imagination.'

On his return to Weimar botany interests him more than ever. He carefully studies Linné's 'Botanical Philosophy' and seeks instruction from specialists of his acquaintance. Presently, as we can see from his letters, a great idea, or what he takes to be such, has begun to float vaguely before his mind. The earliest attempts to describe it are misty and poetic, but gradually it becomes clearer, giving him inexpressible pleasure. On July 10, 1786, he writes to Charlotte von Stein, then the confidant of all his thoughts:

> If I could only impart to another my vision and my delight, but it is impossible. And it is no dream, no fancy; it is a discernment of the essential form with which nature continually plays, as it were, and in playing brings forth the manifold forms of life.

In September, 1786, he takes sudden flight to Italy and his 'botanical whimsies' follow him over the Alps. Wherever he goes the vegetation of Italy divides his attention with poetry and the plastic arts. September 26 he writes from Padua:

It is delightful and instructive to wander about amid a strange vegetation. . . . Here in this novel variety the thought becomes more vivid that all plant forms might perhaps be developed from a single one.

Soon his mind is full of this *Urpflanze* or archetypal plant, and he commences looking for it, at first actually expecting to find it in nature. This quest he soon gives up, however, and the typical plant becomes for him only an imaginary morphological norm. In 1787, while he is in Sicily, it suddenly flashes on him that the various organs of a plant are essentially identical, that is, are variations of the same thing. This idea he follows up eagerly and develops it in an essay, the 'Metamorphosis of Plants,' which was published in 1790—the poet's first actual contribution to scientific literature. The paper is small in compass and very modest in its tone. Its language aims to be scientific, but is in reality often highly figurative and poetic. Its substance is a development of the thesis that cotyledon, leaf, sepal, petal, stamen, and pistil are progressive transformations of a single organ.

But now, before we consider what this theory of the typical plant and of metamorphosis meant to its propounder, a few words must be devoted to his analogous speculations with regard to animal morphology.

It was in 1781 that he began taking formal lessons in anatomy with Professor Loder at Jena. The next year we find him collecting skeletons and observing their homologies. Prominent anatomists like Blumenbach, Sömmerring, and Camper, taught that a fixed morphological distinction between man and brute was to be found in the fact that the latter invariably has the intermaxillary bone, whereas the former invariably lacks it. Goethe

soon became convinced that any such distinction must be illusory. Could it be that nature, whose method was that of gradual transition from one form to another, without breaks and without barriers, had here broken the usual continuity and interposed an impassable barrier in the shape of an unfailing and absolute distinction? He felt that the integrity of his whole philosophy of nature depended on his finding an intermaxillary bone in man. So he went to work with his friend Loder and in the spring of 1784 found what he was looking for. Specialists were slow in admitting his claims, but in time it was seen that he was right.

It is not necessary to the present purpose to consider how far these ideas of Goethe had already been formulated by others or to trace in any detail the subsequent history of his morphological studies. There is no doubt that the ideas were original *for* him if not *with* him in the fullest sense of the word. What he wrote afterwards, not inconsiderable in amount, is only a working out of the germinal conceptions already described. The question of interest here is: What did these conceptions involve? Or, to what extent were they in line with modern evolutionary doctrine?

IV

The answer to our inquiry must turn largely on the meaning attached by Goethe to certain words which occur frequently in his writings, namely, *Urpflanze, Urtier, Urbild, Typus, Schema.* The question is, of course, not so much what these words *de*note in ordinary usage, but what they actually *con*noted for him. Some writers argue that Goethe's idea was only a metaphysical abstraction

involving no hypothesis of *descent* whatever. And undoubtedly there is room for debate since the language employed is sometimes equivocal. Take for example the following passage:

> This, then, we have no hesitation in maintaining: that all the more perfect organisms, among them fishes, amphibians, birds, mammals, and at the head of these last man, are all formed after one archetype (*nach Einem Urbilde*) that simply varies (*hin und her weicht*) more or less and is continually developing and transforming itself through propagation (*durch Fortpflanzung*).

In this utterance some see all the essentials of modern evolution, while others think it means nothing more than if one were to say of half a dozen statues of Venus that they were all formed after one type. This language certainly would not imply that they were all the children of one parent. In fact, the very notion of *descent* from an archetype is an absurdity. But without the idea of descent Goethe's theory has no resemblance to the evolutionary doctrine of today and belongs to metaphysics or esthetics rather than to natural science.

With regard to the theory of metamorphosis similar views have been expressed. Thus the eminent botanist Sachs was of the opinion that Goethe's 'type' had no connotation of descent. He would have us believe that Goethe, scrutinizing the organs of certain plants and observing curious resemblances of form, simply subsumed the current names of the organs under the one name of 'leaf.' If this were all we should have nothing more than a feat of name-giving. It would be much as if one were to pick up half a dozen pebbles more or less similar in shape and select one of them to be the arche-

typal pebble from which the others were to be regarded as morphological variations.

Is this then all that Goethe meant with his *Typus,* his *Urbild,* and his doctrine of metamorphosis? I can not think that it was. There are too many passages in his writings that are irreconcilable with such a view, or with any other view than that there lay in his mind—perhaps it would be better to say that his mind often toyed with —a genuine hypothesis of descent. Otherwise he would hardly have said that the happiest moments of his life were connected with his studies in plant-metamorphosis. No doubt the hypothesis was vaguely held; perhaps it would be better not to use the word hypothesis at all for that which was after all merely an *imagined possibility* which he never undertook to prove or to work out mentally in all its tremendous implications.

It must be admitted that he was much more interested in the forms he saw, and in their purely morphological relation to other forms, than in their immediate or remote parentage. He never tells us how many and what *Urbilder* he finds it convenient to assume, and it must be remembered that his own studies were confined to a comparatively small range of phenogamous plants and vertebrate animals. He makes no serious attempt to answer the many difficult questions which a hypothesis of descent raises. He dilates often, it is true, on the variability of specific and generic distinctions, but he dilates also on the apparent fixity of species and genera, and nowhere does he intimate that the variability which he was so much interested in is sufficient to account for the origin of genera and species. Probably he would have said—though he nowhere does say so—that to

prove a hypothesis of descent would be impossible, since no one could get back to the beginning of things. In short, his mind overleaped and ignored the difficult details of the genetic hypothesis.

Nevertheless, after much study of the many passages of his writings that refer to the subject, I can not doubt that a vague hypothesis of descent was often floating before his mind. Almost from the first awakening of his interest in science the kinship of man with the lower animals is a familiar thought. In November, 1784, we find him writing in so many words that 'man is most closely akin to the animals.' Among the high blessings for which the grateful Faust returns thanks to the Earth-spirit is the sense of brotherhood with all living things:

> The ranks of living creatures thou dost lead
> Before me, teaching me to know my brothers
> In air and water and the silent wood.

This passage of 'Faust' was probably written in 1788. In a letter of Frau von Stein, written somewhat earlier to Knebel, occurs this sentence: 'Herder's new work [the 'Ideas' is referred to] makes it probable that we were once plants and animals.' Now this idea in any such explicit form is not found in Herder, and it is quite certain that Frau von Stein did not originate it. Probably she had it from Goethe. And how can we understand such language as the following if we eliminate the notion of descent?

> Nature can compass her purpose only *in sequence*. She makes no jumps. She could not, for example, produce a horse, had not all the other animals *preceded* on which, as a ladder, she ascends to the structure of the horse.

Highly significant too in this connection is the episode of Homunculus in the Second Part of 'Faust.' Homunculus is a mind without a body and his great aspiration is to 'begin existence,' that is to acquire a body and so become a genuine 'homo.' He accordingly takes expert advice as to how and where he can best do this. As a result he dashes his glass house against the throne of Galatea and dissolves himself with the phosphorescent sea, there to come up in the lapse of eons through the stages of ameba, polyp, fish, reptile, mammal, to the estate of man. In the fable Galatea represents the Goddess of Love, who is going to preside over each stage of his upward progress. The symbolism is perfectly transparent.

But it will be said that this is poetry. Is there, then, in plain and unequivocal prose any evidence of Goethe's attitude on the fundamental articles of the modern evolutionist's faith? We have seen that he early accustomed his mind to operate with very long periods of time. With respect to the mutability of specific distinctions he writes thus:

> The changeableness of plant forms which I had long been observing awakened in me the idea that the forms about us were not originally fixed and determined, but that there had been given to them, along with a singular tenacity of generic and specific character, a fortunate mobility and flexibility by which they had been able to accommodate themselves to such manifold terrestrial conditions, and to form and transform themselves accordingly.

Elsewhere he writes on the same subject:

> If now we look for the occasion of this manifold adaptability (*Bestimmbarkeit*) this is to be said first of all: Animals are formed by circumstances; hence their inner perfection and their adaptation to external circumstances.

Concerning teleological explanations he has this clear and decisive expression of opinion:

> The question to be asked hereafter concerning such members as, for example, the tusks of *sus babirussa*, will not be, What are they good for? but, Whence came they? It will not be said that the bull has been given horns that he may gore with them, but the question will be raised, How came he to have horns for goring?

Even the struggle for existence and its effects in certain specific cases had been observed by him, tho there is no evidence that he had any adequate notion of the importance of the subject. To sum up without further multiplying quotations: The kinship of living organisms, the descent of man from lower orders of life, mutability of specific distinctions, progressive adaptation of organisms to external conditions, the struggle for existence—all these ideas Goethe certainly had. What he did not have was the doctrine of natural selection and the vast array of observed facts which have since taken this whole subject out of the hands of poetic and philosophic generalizers and given it over to a generation of investigators with whose methods Goethe, could he return to our planet, would probably have but scant sympathy. For cutting up and counting lay not in his nature and he had a rooted prejudice against the 'levers and screws' of the laboratory.

> Mysterious in open day,
> Veiled Nature spurns thy violent endeavors;
> She tells her secret to thy mind in her own way,
> If not—of no avail are all thy screws and levers.

CHAPTER XI

THE BELIEVER

I GIVE this title to a chapter on Goethe's religion because for him religion was mainly, at least in his later years, a matter of transcendental belief. For other men it has other aspects which will hardly concern us at all. Looked at in a large historical survey religion may be conceived as a four-sided pyramid one side of which is cult, a second theology, a third ethics, and the fourth mystic emotion. To be sure, this gives us but an imperfect account of the subject, for the various aspects of religion overlap and interblend more or less. Still, these are undeniably its four principal phases. Most men see one side of the pyramid, or perhaps get an oblique view of two, and imagine they have seen it all. A scholar will take care to look at all the four sides before he undertakes to say just what religion in its vital essence is.

Now Goethe knew very well of this four-sidedness, but three of the sides did not interest him. For cult, which now appears to have been, in the form of sacrifice, ritual, and obedience to tabu, religion's most primitive aspect, he hardly cared at all. He was not in the least ecclesiastically minded. He seldom went to church and took at the most only a mild esthetic interest in forms and ceremonies of worship. Nor had he any affinity for theology as a body of doctrine claiming intellectual

allegiance. The creeds, dogmas, propositions, and proofs left him quite unconcerned. As to his conduct, he never professed to regulate it by religious motives or inhibitions. On the other hand, he was deeply sensitive to the mystic aspect of religion. A feeling for the Divine, which he did not often attempt to rationalize, holding that it needed no proofs and was better than proofs, was early and permanently rooted in his nature. In short, he was a Believer—not in cult, creed, or 'mere morality,' but in the Divine.

This by way of general preliminary statement. Some necessary qualifications will appear as we proceed.

I

It is probable that serious thinking on the subject of religion began for Goethe when he was about nineteen years old. The childhood experiences related in 'Poetry and Truth' can hardly have left any very deep mark. He tells how, finding the God of the orthodox too remote for his liking, he built him an altar in Old Testament fashion, that he might have a God of his own—one with whom he could come into personal relations. But such play of imaginative boyhood is common enough and usually has no special significance. What is more important is that the boy Wolfgang was brought up in a religious atmosphere. He read the bible a great deal. His mother had a strong leaning to pietism. He early learned the current doctrines of the church, became familiar with the Christian scheme, heard much talk about it, and had his difficulties over God's benevolence, as did older folk after the great Lisbon earthquake. But all this sat lightly on him. When he was ready for the

university the bent of his mind was altogether secular. Nor is there a hint in any of his numerous letters from Leipsic that religion was then occupying his thoughts.

It was his grave illness of the year 1768 that first brought the subject home to him as a personal affair. Confined to his room, menaced by death, as he at times thought, tenderly ministered to by distressed women of the pietistic persuasion and by a doctor who believed in the occult, he took stock of life as he had never done before. The books that he read at this time were of no spiritual use to him, albeit they filled his mind with ideas, partly religious, that afterwards came into play in 'Faust.' He attended the prayer-meetings of the local pietists and took part in their communion service. It was a normal case of 'conversion' save that there was no agonizing over the safety of his soul, no conviction of sin. He was quite cheerful, feeling sure that his God would take care of him.

In what frame of mind these experiences left him when he was well enough to leave home appears from his letters. One of them, written April 13, 1770, says that he is as he was, except that he is on a 'somewhat better footing with our Lord God and his dear son Jesus Christ.' A few days later he thanks his Savior that he is not what he ought to be, and cites Luther, who was more afraid of his good works than of his sins. On July 28 he writes thus:

> Reflections are a petty merchandise. With prayer, on the other hand, there is good business to be done. A single upwelling of the heart in the name of Him whom for the time being we call *a* Lord, until we are able to call Him *our* Lord, and we are overwhelmed with countless benefactions.

This is the simple faith of the Christian mystic. It is grounded solely on personal experience—a rapturous emotion felt to be communion with God. Strictly speaking it is not faith at all, and is not grounded, so far as these words connote anything intellectual. It simply *is* —like any other up-welling emotion. The mind is not engaged. Of course it needs no sanction of logic, for it does not come within the sphere of the syllogism. It has no need of symbol, mediator, ceremony, or appliance of worship. It *is* worship. Its 'justification' is like that of any other pleasant emotional indulgence. It makes one feel good and dream pleasant dreams.

What happened in the case of Goethe was that he soon tired of his pietistic friends, partly because they were such dull and narrow folk, and partly, it would seem, because they talked too much to suit him about the particularities of the heavenly life. He was more interested in this world; speculation about the exact modus of an imaginary life behind the veil seemed to him as futile as were the proofs unnecessary. Meanwhile the intellect was there, with its insistent questionings; it was not to be put down, since a man could not live all the time on the hights of emotional ecstasy. Gradually the idea took root in his mind that the symbols and intermediaries of worship, as well as the proofs from analogy, from assumed premises, or from written revelation—that all these were a sort of lower surrogate for real religion. They were not to be rejected or even quarreled about, but welcomed as useful, so far as they might aid the up-welling of love from the heart. They were to be accepted as the hungry man accepts roots and herbs when no better food is to be had. If they did not truly upbuild

and nourish the spirit in love; if they provoked hate, contentiousness, and pride of opinion, they were of evil.

This is a religious attitude which differs from the current deism of the eighteenth century in that God is not thought of as the distant ruler of a mechanistic universe, to whom prayer would be either useless or else a merely formal act of homage, but rather as the Immanent Love, with whom the creature is united in and by love. And it differs from the theism of all the centuries in that it lays little stress on creed, dogma, proof, and revelation. It regards these things at the best as props.

Such is the substance of doctrine set forth in that curious 'Letter of Pastor ——' published by Goethe in the year 1772. The fiction is that the letter is written by an elderly clergyman to a young colleague who has just been called to a neighboring parish as successor to a highly contentious pastor now gone to his reward. The old pastor hopes that the new man will avoid contention. He is not to argue with unbelievers, lest he be discomfited, but to let them go their way. He is to be infinitely tolerant, yet not indifferent; unshakable in his own faith, yet ready to believe that God will find ways to save even skeptics and mockers. 'What a joy to think that the Turk who takes me for a dog, and the Jew who takes me for a swine will one day be glad to be my brothers.' The creeds are provisional formulas, the eucharist a symbol for the senses. Uniformity of beliefs and symbols is not desirable. 'We are all Christians, and Augsburg and Dortrecht make no more difference in religion than France and Germany in the nature of men.' The ultimate mysteries are never to be argued about, since no man can understand them. The essence of the whole

matter is love and the belief in love. The old pastor formulates his creed thus:

> I regard the belief in the divine love, which so many years ago went about on a bit of the earth as a man under the name of Jesus Christ, as the one foundation of my blessedness; and that is what I tell my people as often as there is opportunity. I do not subtilize the matter; for as God became man in order that we poor creatures of sense might lay hold of and comprehend Him, we must take particular care not to make Him God again.

A review of Haller's 'Letters on the most Important Truths of Revelation,' published in 1772, contains this passage:

> But we submit to all fanatics on both sides whether it is a fitting idea of the Supreme Being to treat every mode of conceiving him and of man's relation to him as an affair of God, and hence to maintain in a spirit of persecution that what God wishes to have us regard as good and evil is actually good and evil in His sight; and whether that which for our eye is broken into two colors may not return to Him in a single ray of light. Anger and forgiveness in an unchangeable being are truly but a mode of conceiving Him. We all agree in this that a man should do what we all call good, whether his soul be a dirty puddle or a mirror of nature's beauty; whether he have the strength to go on his way, or be sick and in need of a crutch. Crutch and strength are from *one* hand.

Another review ends with a shaft at those who make of Christ a morose tyrant, ever ready with the thunderbolt of his wrath when he does not find absolute perfection. 'We must say it because it has long lain on our heart, that Voltaire, Hume, La Mettrie, Helvetius, Rousseau, and all their kind have done far less harm to religion than the strict, morbid Pascal and his school.'

II

It appears from all this that by the time he was ready for 'Werther' and 'Faust' Goethe had worked out for himself a purely emotional religion whose starting-point had been the mystic exaltation of prayer. He regarded this religion as containing the pure essence of Christianity and himself therefore as a good Christian. He habitually used the terms of the Christian religion. He was of course well aware of his heterodoxy but doxies did not interest him. Neither did sin. His God had made nature as it is—including human nature—sinners as well as saints. All were His children and He would take care of them. He was the Eternal Pardoner. Secure in his heretical faith he did not care to give it a name or to make proselytes. Yet he was mildly impatient—rather inconsistently, since the proselyter too is a child of God, —with those who tried to proselyte him. Perhaps the best account of his way of thinking on the subject of proselyting is contained in a letter of April 26, 1774, to a man named Pfenninger:

Thank you, dear brother, for your warm solicitude about your brother's spiritual welfare. Believe me, the time will come when we shall understand each other. You talk to me as to an unbeliever who wants to understand, who wants proofs, who has not experienced. The opposite of that is in my heart. . . . And that you should always be coming at me with testimonies! To what end? Do I need testimony that I live, that I feel? Only I do value, yes, love and worship the testimonies which show me that thousands or only one before me have felt the very thing that strengthens and fortifies me. And so the word of men is for me the word of God, no matter whether priests or harlots have gathered it and stamped it as canonical, or have scattered it abroad in the form of frag-

ments. And with all my soul I fall on my brother's neck—Moses! prophet! evangelist, apostle, Spinoza, or Machiavelli! But I may also say to each one of them: Dear friend, your case is like my own. In particulars you feel powerfully and gloriously, but the Whole wouldn't go into your head any more than it goes into mine.

At the beginning of 'Werther' this mystic religion of love appears as nature-worship. Werther's expansive emotion as he revels in the May landscape is felt as the love of God. He writes thus of lying in the deep grass by a running brook:

When I feel closer to my heart all the little creatures, the tiny worms and bugs among the grass-blades, and feel the presence of the Almighty who created us in his image, of the All-loving who bears us aloft and sustains us in eternal bliss; my friend, when at such times a mist comes over my eyes and the earth and sky about me rest entire in my soul, like the form of a beloved maiden, then a longing often comes over me and I think: Oh, couldst thou express that, couldst thou breathe upon the paper that which lives in thee so full, so warm, so that it should become the mirror of thy soul, as thy soul is the mirror of the living God!

But such a religion, having no intellectual basis whatever, is foredoomed to be the plaything of moods. It can not bear up against the whips and scorns of time. After a lapse of three months the same scene that had called forth these raptures presents itself to Werther as a vast process of continual destruction. To quote:

The most casual walk costs myriads of little worms their life, a step of the foot destroys the toil-wrought houses of the ants and crushes a little world into an ignominious grave. Oh, it is not the great and rare distress of the world that moves me, not the floods that wash away your villages, the earthquakes that swallow up your cities; what undermines my heart is the destructive power that is hidden in all nature, which has

formed nothing that does not destroy its neighbor or itself. And so I reel along beset with fear. Heaven and earth and all the destructive forces about me! I see naught but an ever-devouring, ever-ruminating monster.

Like Werther, Faust has a purely emotional religion which exercises no inhibitory influence on his conduct. He never thinks of it in that connection. For him all strong feeling partakes of the nature of religion, and not to feel strongly spells misery. What impels him to magic is his dream of ecstatic communion with a spirit—a rapturous state in which knowledge and joy shall blend as one. When the middle-aged skeptic sets the poison to his lips he is stayed by a rush of Easter memories—of a time when prayer was a fervid joy and a strange sweet longing would lure him out into the fields, there to shed floods of hot tears as he felt a new world coming into being within him. When he returns from his soothing walk on Easter Sunday he is at first filled with a divine peace. But soon the stream runs low and in that thirsty inferior state he turns to revelation and begins to translate from John's gospel. The implication is clear that if the stream of feeling had remained at high tide he would have needed no bible. He describes his love for Margaret as a rapture which must be eternal, whose ending would be despair—words which mean that the sexual attraction is felt as a part of the Eternal Love.

But the classic passage for the religion of Goethe's youth is Faust's impassioned sermon to Margaret:

> Who dare express Him?
> And who profess Him,
> Saying: I believe in Him!
> Who, feeling, seeing,

Deny His being,
Saying: I believe Him not!
The All-enfolding,
The All-upholding,
Folds and upholds he not
Thee, me, Himself?
Arches not there the sky above us?
Lies not beneath us, firm, the earth?
And rise not, on us shining,
Friendly, the everlasting stars?
Look I not, eye to eye, on thee,
And feelst not, thronging,
To head and heart, the force
Still weaving its eternal secret,
Invisible, visible, round thy life?
Vast as it is, fill with that force thy heart,
And when thou in the feeling wholly blessed art,
Call it, then, what thou wilt,—
Call it Bliss! Heart! Love! God!
I have no name to give it!
Feeling is all in all:
The Name is sound and smoke,
Obscuring Heaven's clear glow.

III

In the course of time, under the impact of new experience, this religious attitude underwent a notable change which it is impossible to trace step by step and difficult to describe in exact language. Nothing epochal happened unless it were the reading of Spinoza; and that can hardly have been epochal, since at the most it was only a re-reading under new light and with better understanding. Be that as it may (see above, page 178), the change that took place can hardly be better described than as a change from an emotional love of God to that which Spinoza calls the intellectual love of God, which is only another name for acquiescence in the nature of

things. Perhaps the change would have come about in very much the same way without Spinoza, for after all it was in part only the normal human development from adolescence to middle life; from the years when the lower psychic centers are dominant and sexual love is quite apt to be felt as a divine mystery, to the more calm and steady regnance of the higher centers. What happened in Goethe's case is what has happened in myriads of others, with the difference that there was a more violent oscillation over a longer arc.

In a sense feeling still continued to be the alpha and omega of religion, but particular feelings keyed up to ecstasy by some incident of time or chance no longer seemed to be the only avenue of approach to the Divine. There was also an intellectual approach—the way of observation and reasoning—and on this path the ecstasies of feeling had no proper place. They might even be dangerous as tending to restrict or becloud a man's vision of the truth. Instead of being indulged to the utmost as life's supreme blessing they needed rather to be held in check as only one of its blessings.

But the fundamental mysticism remained. Never for a moment, either early or late, did Goethe once imagine that human wit, whether of priest or mystic or sage, could ever penetrate to the very mind of God as disclosed in the totality of things. Each might advance a little way from some new-won eminence of his own and catch a fresh glimpse of the celestial city in the clouds, but no one would ever actually reach and survey it. The All was inscrutable, incommensurable with the human mind. But it was there for reverence, and reverence remained for Goethe to the end of his days the very heart of all

good religion. In the ' Wanderings ' of Wilhelm Meister he has a famous passage on the three reverences—for that which is above us, for that which is about us, and for that which is below us. One of his prose sayings is to the effect that it is very easy to be witty if one has no respect for anything.

Naturally the official spokesmen of organized religion soon came to look on him as a lost man—as no Christian. And indeed he had ceased to be a Christian in any accepted sense of the word. He no longer made any profession of a faith specifically Christian, and for about twenty-five years of his life—say roughly from 1785 to 1810—he often let fly a shaft of ill-humor at the priests. What he saw of the Catholic clergy in Italy displeased him for the most part, and still less could he stomach the zealotry of Protestants and pietists. He did not mind the hard words they gave him in return and in time cheerfully accepted the name of heathen. But from his point of view the priests and his pique at them had nothing to do with real religion, which he felt to be an affair of the individual soul reacting to the total push of the cosmos. In this holy of holies sacerdotalism had no place. His God was the immanent divinity of the world, not the anthropomorphic deity of ceremonial worship. At the same time he probably felt in his inmost being that he was a better Christian, had a truer insight into the original genius of Christ's religion, than had those who denounced him as a heathen and a pantheist. The words *Gott* and *göttlich* never ceased to be familiar and awesome words of his vocabulary. Of religion in what he conceived to be its quintessence he never spoke otherwise than tenderly.

Herder finished the fourth part of his 'Ideas' in 1788, but withheld it from publication for three years, fearing, it would seem, that the book might make trouble in influential quarters. But he sent the manuscript to Goethe to read. The seventeenth book is a drastic arraignment of the medieval church, which is presented as a sad perversion of the original Christian religion. On reading it Goethe wrote to Herder, at that time his most intimate friend, as follows:

You have treated Christianity worthily; for my part I thank you. I have now had an opportunity to get a closer view of it in the domain of art, and there it is right pitiful. Many an old *gravamen* has been stirred up within me. It remains true: The fairy-tale of Christ is responsible for the fact that the world may stand for ten thousand years longer and no one come to his senses, because it requires just as much strength, knowledge, understanding, and insight to defend it as to oppose it. The generations pass and the individual is badly off, no matter which side he takes; the whole is never a whole. And so the human race oscillates to and fro in rags and tatters—all of which would not signify much did it not have great influence on things which are so essential to man. Never mind. Look well about you in the Roman church and take your delight in that which is delightful.

IV

In his later years, as we have seen (above, page 154), Goethe thought less unkindly of Catholicism. Its forms and symbols and saint-lore appealed to the mystic within him as a way of approach to the Inscrutable. But he never came to terms with theology as an attempt to fathom the unfathomable for the intellect. It were therefore quite futile to attempt to define the final phase of his religion in any exact terms, or to dwell on the difficulties that arise when an out-and-out pantheist who

is at the same time an agnostic undertakes to distinguish between God and not-God; between feelings that are divine or holy and feelings that are not divine or holy. As a thinker he felt the difficulties and simply made no serious attempt to meet them. For him religion was a vital necessity, yet not an affair of the mind; it was something that begins when the mind recoils baffled from the periphery of the knowable. But he was much given to thinking *about* religion and explaining his way of looking at it. Toward the last it was a favorite subject of his talks with Eckermann. Inasmuch as the main purpose of this study is not to labor the ultimate questions involved, but rather to portray the religion of Goethe and show how the mind of a great man reacted to the riddle of the ages, I can hardly do better than to bring together some of his more notable utterances and set them down with such slight comment as may seem to be in order. It was a theory of his, the universal validity of which is questionable, that the child is naturally a realist, the youth an idealist, the man a skeptic, the old man a mystic.

Goethe held that the world-process is rational, yet unintelligible. Its rationality is so far akin to that of man that we may get partial glimpses of it in certain states of consciousness; but in the main it is an impenetrable mystery. Sometimes the Power that made and makes the world presents itself to him as purposive will that is mysteriously guiding the individual in the right path. He wrote in a letter of the year 1782:

> So much I can assure you: that in the midst of happiness I live in a continual resignation; and amid all my toil and moil I see that not my will is being done, but that of a higher power whose thoughts are not my thoughts.

Had his pantheism really been of the very purest water, unaffected by his early communings with a personal Savior, he would hardly have found room in the world for special providence. Yet he believed in special providences—at least for men of aspiration and good will. It is Faust's 'consciousness of the right way' that is going to baffle the Devil. Again, we read in 'Wilhelm Meister':

> That I always go forward and never backward; that my actions become evermore like my idea of perfection; that I daily find it easier to do what I consider right, even with my weak body which has so often refused me service—can all that be explained from human nature whose corruptness I have seen into so deeply? Not for me. I scarcely remember a commandment, nothing appears to me in the form of a law. There is an inner urging that leads me and guides me ever aright. I freely follow my thoughts, knowing as little of restriction as of remorse. Thank God that I recognize to whom I owe this happiness and that I can think only with humility of these advantages. For never shall I run the risk of becoming proud of my powers and abilities, seeing that I have so clearly perceived what a monster may be begotten and nourished in every human heart unless a higher power protects us.

Elsewhere Meister observes that 'real religion remains an inner, even an individual phenomenon; for it has to do solely with the conscience, which is to be aroused and satisfied.' This is good Kantian doctrine, but the thought is hardly a favorite one with Goethe. He was not given to talking much about conscience and the moral law. His heroes make no pretense of living by it. They live by their instinct, just as Meister says he does.

Johannes Falk represents Goethe as saying to him in the year 1813:

> I can know nothing more of God than that which my limited range of sense perception on this earth warrants, and that is

little enough. But no limits are set to belief. On the contrary, considering the immediateness of divine feelings within us, it may happen that our knowledge appears as piecework, that every observation remains imperfect and must be supplemented by belief. We must proceed from the principle that knowledge and belief are not there to neutralize but to supplement each other. Then we shall always go right.

In this connection I quote three passages from Eckermann:

What then do we know of the idea of the Divine and what meaning have our petty conceptions of the Supreme Being? Were I to use a hundred names I should still fall short, and in comparison with such limitless attributes I should have said simply nothing.

I do not ask whether this Highest Being has understanding and reason, but I feel that it *is* understanding, is reason, itself. All creatures are permeated with it, and man has so much of it that he can cognize parts of the Highest.

The reason of man and the reason of the Deity are two very different things. As soon as we concede freedom to man it is all up with God's omniscience; for as soon as God knows what I am going to do I am compelled to act as he knows. I adduce this only as showing how little we know, and that it is not good to disturb divine mysteries.

Divine mysteries—in the plural number! The Pope himself could hardly say more. Such an utterance shows how far Goethe was after all from that fearless scientific spirit which holds that if there is anything divine in human nature it is precisely the love of truth for its own sake. He had spent many years in scientific research, but had generally been seeking confirmation for a preconceived idea. Of the temper that attacks a question without any prepossession whatever, not caring whither the inquiry may lead, caring only to know how the thing really was or is, but intent on knowing *that*, no matter whose beliefs may be upset or what traditional

heavens may fall—of that temper he had not a particle.

And so, always weak in metaphysics, yet possessed of an unconquerable desire to peer behind the veil, he oscillated in his old age between contradictory ideas. At one moment he could insist vehemently on the absolute unknowableness of God and denounce the priests for claiming to know so much about Him. At another time he could swallow the whole sacerdotal bolus and vent his wrath on the historical critics for disturbing his own particular ideas, admittedly inadequate, of the Supreme Being. Thus he said to Eckermann in 1823:

> Men treat God as if the incomprehensible, absolutely inexcogitable Supreme Being were little more than one of their own kind. Else they would not say the Lord God, the dear God, the good God. For them, especially the clergy who talk about Him daily, He becomes a phrase, a mere name, in connection with which they think nothing whatever. But if they were permeated with a sense of His greatness they would be mute and for reverence not care to name Him.

On another occasion, a few years later, he said:

> Genuine or spurious are curious questions to raise concerning the bible. What is genuine but the altogether excellent, that which is in harmony with our purest nature and reason, and serves us today for our highest development? And what is spurious but the absurd, hollow, stupid, that which bears no fruit, at least none that is good. I regard all the four gospels as absolutely genuine, for in them is at work the glory of a majesty that proceeded from the person of Christ and is as divine as anything that has ever appeared on earth. If you ask me whether it lies in my nature to offer him reverent worship, I answer, Most assuredly. I bow before him as the divine revelation of the highest principle of morality.

Here is the idea of a perfectly valid revelation of which we should know nothing whatever except for certain ancient books. But in reading those books we are

not to apply our judgment or critical acumen. No matter who wrote them, or when, or why, or how they got into the canon. We are to trust entirely to our subjective feeling for the Divine. One can not help asking, What if one man's feeling should differ from another's?

V

Sometimes Goethe went so far as to deny that there is any revelation of the Divine in history. Thus he makes Wilhelm Meister say:

I can not comprehend at all how people have been able to believe that God speaks to us in books and stories. He to whom the world does not immediately disclose its relation to himself, whom his own heart does not tell what he owes to others, will hardly learn it from books, which properly speaking are there only to give names to our errors.

This idea, so diametrically opposed to Goethe's earlier views, to the whole teaching of Herder, and to the general consensus of religious mankind, is perhaps to be taken in connection with his distinction between the understanding and the reason. According to this distinction the understanding is concerned with the dead past, the reason with the living present. He said—this again is from Eckermann—:

The understanding does not reach up to Nature. Man must be capable of rising to the highest reason in order to touch the Divinity that is revealed in primary phenomena, physical as well as moral, behind which it abides and which proceed from it. But the Divinity is active only in what is alive, not in what is dead; in that which is developing and changing, not in that which is completed and stagnant. Therefore reason, in its tendency toward the Divine, has to do only with that which is coming to be, that which is alive; the understanding with that which has come to be and is stationary.

How he imagined the future of religion also appears from some of his latest talks with Eckermann:

Even if mental culture progresses for ever, science becoming wider and deeper and the human spirit expanding as it may, there will be no outgrowing of the majesty and moral culture of Christianity as it shimmers and gleams in the gospels.

Also the miserable sectarianism of the Protestants will come to an end, and therewith hate and enmity between father and son, between brother and sister. For when people comprehend and absorb the pure doctrine of Christ's love as it is, man will feel great and free and will lay no particular stress on trifling differences of ritual.

With respect to his belief in immortality Goethe often expressed himself in his old age. It is certain that he clung to the belief tenaciously and regarded it as indispensable; but whether he believed in a real survival of personality after death, or only in the reabsorption of the particular drop into the divine ocean of life from which it sprang, is not so easy to decide. His utterances can be taken either way. Certain it is, however, that he was not content to rest his belief solely on a faith that transcends reason. He thought he could justify it by proofs; but, as is nearly always the case when men attempt to argue this question, his proofs have little weight for a mind in need of argument. He once said to Chancellor Müller:

In all his earthly life man feels deeply and clearly in himself that he is a citizen of that spiritual kingdom the belief in which we can neither reject nor give up. In this belief, which we can not get rid of, lies the mystery of an eternal pushing on toward an unknown goal.

And again to Countess Egloffstein:

The power to ennoble all things sensuous and to animate the deadest material by wedding it to a spiritual idea is the

surest guaranty of our supermundane origin. However we may be attracted and held fast by a thousand and one phenomena of this earth, we are forced by an inward longing ever and again to lift up our eyes to heaven, because a deep inexplicable feeling gives us the conviction that we are citizens of those worlds that shine above us so mysteriously and to which we shall one day return.

This conception of man as a citizen of two worlds, that is, as partaking by his thought in a kind of mind-stuff which is indestructible and can not be imagined away, underlies many a saying, for example:

It is absolutely impossible for a thinking man to imagine non-existence, a cessation of thinking and living. To that extent everyone carries in himself the proof of immortality.

The thought of death leaves me perfectly calm, for I have the firm conviction that our mind is an absolutely indestructible form of being, something that works on from eternity to eternity. It is like the sun, which merely seems to our earthly eyes to set, while it really never sets but shines continually.

I should not at all like to do without the happiness of believing in an eternal existence; yes, I could say with Lorenzo dei Medici that all those who hope for no other life are dead for this life. . . . He who believes in a continued life should be happy in a quiet way, but he has no reason to plume himself on the belief.

Sometimes, in his efforts to conceive the inconceivable, he thought of the endless life as an impersonal, undifferentiated mode of existence, again as a hierarchy of souls graded somehow according to merit previously acquired. Thus he makes one of the characters in the 'Elective Affinities' say that the 'pure feeling of a final, universal equality, at least after death, seems to me more soothing than this obstinate, stolid projection of our personalities, attachments, and relations.' On the other hand, Eckermann records him as saying in 1829: 'I do not

doubt of our continued existence, for nature can not do without the entelechy. But we are not all immortal in the same way; and in order to manifest oneself as a great entelechy hereafter it is necessary to be one here.'

But enough of these citations. I have only wished to make clear from the authentic testimony of his own words—so far as we can trust the records—how the aging Goethe spoke inconsistently, according to the mood of the hour, on questions of religion, and how he was wont to argue the case for his own belief in immortality. It is clear that he believed the human mind to be a part of the indestructible energy that pervades and actuates the All. He accordingly believed that the spiritual *elements* of personality, or at least some of them, were by their very nature imperishable. But whether he believed that the *form* of personality, that is, the particular grouping of the imperishable elements in connection with a perishable body—whether he believed that this too would survive and resist dispersion after the cataclysm of physical death, remains uncertain.

CHAPTER XII

THE POET

IN this study of Goethe the poet I shall have regard mainly to his lyric verse and his shorter poems of reflection, ignoring such poetry as may be contained in metrical plays or in long narratives like 'Hermann and Dorothea.' Such a limitation is unphilosophic in a sense, for his poetic nature was indivisible. One might even say that it was his poetic faculty which made him what he was by fusing the rest of him into a fluid evolving unity. Think that away and what remains is not Goethe at all. Nevertheless, he himself was much given, at different periods of his life, to philosophizing over his own poetic process. If *he* could think of the poet in him as something apart from the rest of his being we may surely do likewise.

True it is, again, that poetry in one sense or another tinged nearly everything that he wrote, including his contributions to science. The charm of 'Iphigenie' and the fascination of 'Faust' reside largely in their poetry; and if we were to take the word in the broad sense of the German *Dichtung,* which includes imaginative composition of all kinds, something similar might be said of 'Werther' and even of 'Wilhelm Meister.' But I do not now take the word in the broad sense of the

German *Dichtung,* but in the restricted sense familiar to English and French usage. 'Iphigenie' and 'Faust' are primarily plays, just as 'Werther' and 'Wilhelm Meister' are primarily novels. Whatever poetry they embody may thus fairly be considered as incidental, to be taken note of when we are occupied with the dramatist and the novelist.

And after all, the limitation proposed *is* philosophic in a way, because the modern poet is essentially a lyric poet, or at least an artificer of little things. His works are *opuscula.* I have heard a man of insight maintain that a long poem is impossible. Of yore, no doubt, the poet might be a story-teller, a singer, a seer, a sage, a purveyor of communal pleasure in song and dance, an inciter to action. Perhaps his story-telling function was the most important, and for that he was wont to allow himself plenty of time as he spun out his interminable epics. But in our day the story-telling function has been inherited by the romancer and the novelist, who try to win us by their plot (or lack of it) and characters, which do not now fall under the head of poetry, albeit the Greek conception included them. Again, the function of the dramatic poet, as practiced say by Sophocles, has been distributed under our modern division of labor among the playwright, the composer, the ballet-master, and the ethical teacher; while the ancient interpreter of divine ways is now represented by philosophers, preachers, and moralists who mostly deliver themselves in prose. Thus there remains for the poet of our day only the lyric sphere and that of marginal commentator on the book of life. This is what I mean to include in the present chapter.

I

The world has agreed—such feeble dissent as there is may be ignored—to regard Goethe as the greatest of German poets. It may well be, however, that the reputation of the poet has acquired some adventitious luster from the general prestige of the man, who was so much besides. Writers often praise or dispraise the poet when they evidently mean the philosopher, the critic of life. It may be observed in passing that Matthew Arnold's formula for Goethe's distinction, 'the clearest, largest, and most helpful thinker of modern times,' takes no account of his poetry; for surely clear thinking is not primarily a poet's affair. What then *is* his affair if we begin by subtracting the invention of a more or less elaborate fiction or plot such as *can* be told in prose? Let us say tentatively, not forgetting that the quintessence of poetry will always evade precise definition in prose, that the poet's affair is to feel intensely and to express his feeling in rhythmic language that appeals strongly to the sense of artistic fitness. To feel intensely: this is not to say passionately. There is much excellent poetry that is not impassioned, but none without the emotional stress, fervor, glow, that is its birthmark. In proportion as a poet's feeling touches a wide range of human experience, is universal without being trivial; in proportion, too, as his words bear the stamp of a unique artistic fitness that does not age with time or stale with repetition—we call him great.

In using the word 'feeling' where another might perhaps have preferred the word 'thought' I do not exactly mean to set a stigma on intellectual poetry. Thought

and feeling are not enemies, the one to be taken and the other left; they are rather twins who have grown up together, becoming inseparable and indistinguishable. 'Brain-spun' as applied to poetry is thought to be a term of reproach; Goethe himself once damned a piece of would-be poetic creation as 'only thought.' Still, it is well enough to remember that in the life of the race what is best is all brain-spun. If poetry were *only* a matter of feeling it is difficult to see how, in practicing the art, an heir of all the ages would have any obvious advantage over the ancient cave-dweller. That which repels in argumentative or opinionative verse is less often its intellectuality than its coldness; for the intellect may glow, too. Mere logic, however acute and however irreproachably measured off into longs and shorts, can never do the work of poetry until the intellect becomes at least incandescent and the imagination begins to flash its lights.

That which it most boots us to know about a poet is not his opinions, albeit these may have their biographic interest, but how he envisaged life, to what he was especially sensitive, where his fancy liked to play. Since the style is the man his mere art of expression may also properly concern us to some extent. But knowledge of a poet's technic and the close scrutiny of his style are worth while only so far as they really help us to get and retain the savor of him and to have a true feeling for his *Eigenart*. To do that, however, it is necessary to see him under the aspect of evolution as steadily made over by the Genius of Life. His poetry reflects his character, his moods, his changing philosophy, his reaction to the total urge of existence. As for Goethe, we have to re-

member that the youthful dreamer who took his seat in the ducal council of Weimar in 1776 was a very different man from the author of the 'Roman Elegies,' and he again altogether unlike the aging emulator of Hafiz. It should be against the law to quote Goethe's verse as an evidence of his way of envisaging life unless one knows and has duly considered *which* Goethe it is that one is quoting.

II

Let us first turn our attention, then, to the poetry of Goethe's youth—that which preceded, say roughly, the year 1776. Strange as it may sound, there is really not very much of it. In the Prelude to 'Faust,' written in middle life, the Poet is made to speak mournfully of his youth as a time when the fountain of song flowed incessantly. The passage is of course biographic and implies that, as it seemed to him in the retrospect, his early years had been largely dominated by the lyric mood. But it was hardly so. One can not say that the youth of Goethe was on the whole highly prolific in song. According to the best census I can make, the number of short poems that are surely Goethe's and were surely written prior to 1776 is not more than sixty or seventy. This would mean, if the lyric flow had been distributed evenly over the ten years of his adolescence, an average of six or seven per annum. My list takes account of every string of verses that has a title or a definite theme, regardless of their lyric quality. It includes a number of the merest bagatelles that have no poetic distinction whatever.

Now this is not an extraordinary showing in point of

mere poetic affluence. One can easily think of many less famous poets whose youth was much richer in song than Goethe's. Even Lessing, who in time became convinced that he was no poet at all, was more prolific of *petites poésies* in his youth. So was Schiller, and so were several of the Romanticists. At best the trope of the copious spring is applicable in Goethe's case only now and then when the lyric impulse had been quickened by a fresh love-affair.

I am groping toward an answer to the question: How would Goethe rank as a poet if we had to judge him solely by the work of his youth and quite without regard either to his later prestige as a critic of life or to his early prestige as a novelist and a playwright? And we must admit that if fecundity was not a particularly strong point of his, neither was variety. Several of the lyric themes that have made much tinkling in the corridors of time were quite alien, or all but alien, to his early muse. Such, for example, are religion, patriotism, friendship, wine, the brave days of old, springtime, war, and death. This does not mean, of course, that he was insensitive to these things, but only that they did not stir him to verse-making in his early years. Afterwards some of them did. It is really remarkable, in view of his genius for friendship, that there are no early poems inspired by that theme. I do not overlook the 'odes' to Behrisch. They are not really poems of friendship, but prosodic efforts dedicated to a student's passing acquaintance. So with regard to religion. At the age of twenty Goethe passed a religious crisis which bit deep into his inner being; but it did not move him to poetic expression, except long afterwards in 'Faust.' The juvenile

poem of 'Christ's Descent into Hell' does not count in this connection. It again is a prosodic effort which might just as well, so far as personal feeling is concerned, have been about Siegfried and the dragon.

The most of the early poems are occupied either with the stirrings of sexual love or with one or another phase of nature-feeling. These are the two chief sources of lyric inspiration and they often flow together in the same poem. The erotic strain is predominant; so let us consider that first.

The 'New Songs' of 1769, twenty in number and presenting of course a selection of what Goethe himself liked best in his lyric production up to that time, are nearly all love-songs. In style and temper they belong to the age of gallantry. Love is thought of rather frivolously—one may not say ignobly—as an interesting game pursued by the male sex with little concern about a permanent mating. The sport has its thrills and titillations, its anxieties and pangs, its forbidden fruit; altogether it is a good subject to philosophize about, tho the philosophy that emerges is rather boyish. One gets an impression of facile talent making verses in the fashion of the time, twittering lightly of the sexual attraction, and occasionally risking a mild impropriety—all without any high commission from Apollo. What is most noticeable in the artistry of these songs is their extreme simplicity of phrasing. The words are the common coin of the realm—nowhere anything striking or scintillant. Compared with the difficult soaring and the verbal audacities of many another young lyrist, the early verse of Goethe seems almost commonplace.

As we should expect from the great volatility of his

sexual feeling—a new sweetheart every year or two—poetry of a deeply passionate tinge was not his affair. Nowhere the fervid note of souls mated for eternity, as in Klopstock, or drawn together by the pre-established harmony of the cosmos, as in Schiller. This applies not only to the Leipsic songs, but to those that came later. There is really but one poem in the entire number which says 'I love you' in the present tense, and says it in words at once perfectly serious, deeply impassioned, and free from all introspective comment. This is the May-song beginning

> How Nature gleams
> In a radiance rare!
> How bright the sun
> And the field how fair!

Some of the songs are retrospective, in accord with Wordsworth's formula of 'emotion remembered in tranquillity.' Such is the one beginning 'My heart beat fast,' published in Jacobi's *Iris* for March, 1775, but evidently begotten of a much earlier visit to Friederike at Sesenheim. The poet *remembers* the beating of his heart as he mounted his horse, the eerie things of the moonlit landscape, the mild joy beaming from the maiden's face, his own sense of not deserving such happiness, the pain of the inevitable parting.

The other Sesenheim poems—I refer to those which are certainly Goethe's—are trifles that speak the language of sentimental endearment rather than of fervid passion. The prettiest of them, 'Little flowers, tiny leaflets,' is supposed to adorn the dress of the 'young rose' who receives it. The last stanza expresses the hope that the tie which binds her to the sender may be no

'frail bond of roses.' In view of what happened this may be set down to the account of poetic moonshine. So too the verses beginning 'This message brings a little chain,' sent with a gold neck-chain. The tone of these poems is always happy. There is no hint of the misgivings which, as we know from other sources, were troubling the mind of the writer—no bitterness in the exhilarating cup.

It is otherwise with the few songs that grew out of Goethe's short-lived engagement in the year 1775. Lili, or Belinda, as he sometimes calls the object of his half-reluctant devotion, is at once his bliss and his torment. We never hear the note of happy abandon, but rather that of unrest and complaint that love has disturbed his habits. It is probable that Schiller, listening with rapt attention and hearing spheral harmonies in the divine Laura's piano-playing, would have thought the upsetting of his previous routine a negligible grief. But Goethe was less given to blowing iridescent literary bubbles. Lili's parties and balls, her buzzing admirers, the social flutter in which she lived, bored him and gave him concern for the future. Why should she call him away from the dreamy seclusion of his attic chamber at night and compel him to play cards with uninteresting folk? And yet—the maid is so *very* bewitching.

> Where thou art, angel, love and goodness are,
> Where thou art is Nature.

But Goethe's early love-affairs, notwithstanding the ado that has been made about them in printed books, beginning with 'Poetry and Truth,' were in no sense epochal events in his life. None of them left a deep

mark in his inner being. His was not one of the natures that crave or are capable of giving a stedfast, all-centering love; it was rather eclectic, needing love for the poet, but not imperatively for the man. This is not to say that he was ever insincere. He was merely volatile, easily attracted but not to be held. He dreaded marriage because it would restrict his freedom, yet he knew that the great prizes are not to be had without paying for them. Hence his characteristic 'restlessness' and the mixed note of joy *and* pain in his early love-poetry. Again and again we hear the plaint. There is no happiness without love, yet no happiness with it, since all is transitory.

> Like dreams the warmest kisses pass,
> And all delight is like a kiss.

In 'Christel,' one of the most charming of his early love-songs, published in Wieland's *Merkur* for April, 1776, even the giddy pleasure of the dance is infected with this nameless pain. When her eyes look love at him, forgetting all the world as she draws him close and gives him a kiss,

> It thrills me as we glide along
> Down to my little toe;
> I am so weak, I am so strong,
> So full of joy *and* woe.

No doubt it makes a poet interesting to us moderns if he hint now and then—not too persistently—of a trouble rooted not in any personal affliction but in the world's woe. This suggests profound experience, while unvarying cheerfulness may arouse the suspicion that he does not know enough to be sad. Goethe was the first Ger-

man poet to make much of this nameless pain and to exploit the 'solace of tears.' It would not be true to say that the note was ever habitual with him or that it continued long to be heard in his verse. But it harmonized with occasional moods of his youth and begot a kind of poesy that appealed to a sentimental age. What has saved the poems and endeared them to more virile epochs is, just as in the case of 'Werther,' their exquisite artistry and their engaging rendition of the simple common values. Here lies the charm of the 'King of Thule,' the 'Heath-rose,' and of such little gems as 'On the Lake' and 'Hunter's Evening-song.'

III

Our next period extends from 1776 to 1789, when the first edition of the collected poems came from the press of Göschen. This edition enables us to date at least roughly a number of poems that otherwise might not be datable at all.

Considering how all of Goethe's major literary projects came to a standstill at Weimar, how hard he worked at the public business, and that toward the last he often suffered from a depression of spirits amounting almost to hypochondria, one is prone to think of this epoch as a time of poetic dearth. But it was not really so. The short poems of this decade—none appeared between 1786 and 1789—are quite numerous and much richer in import than those of the preceding ten years. This is the period that brought forth the two exquisite evening-songs 'Thou who art in Heaven,' and 'Over all heights,' the splendid ballads 'Elf-king' and 'Fisherman,' the noble personal poems 'Ilmenau' and 'Hans Sachs's Mission,'

the tender melancholy of 'Again thou fillest copse and vale,' the lofty music of 'Let man be noble' and the 'Soul of man is like the water,' and the string of lyric jewels in 'Wilhelm Meister,' notably 'Knowst thou the land' and 'Who never ate his bread with tears.'

These poems, taken by and large, are no longer the mere record of passing moods or of personal adventure in the little world of feeling and fancy. Something like a dominant philosophy begins to emerge. To be sure, it emerges very gradually and is rather elusive when one tries to describe it in exact words. The old unrest lives on for a while and forms the burden of several songs. But there is a difference. It is as if the poet were no longer intent solely on his own private woe, like an infant crying in the night, but were more concerned to search out the connection between his inner trouble and the Great Order, which now begins to be felt as wise and beautiful. Pain is a means of grace. Knowledge of the heavenly powers is only for him who has eaten his bread with tears. The iron necessity that rules in Nature is part of her beauty and the source of her power to soothe and uplift. A man is to be 'noble, helpful, and good,' not from mere instinct or impulse, but because that 'alone distinguishes him from all the beings that we know.'

This calm determination to take life as it comes and acquiesce in the will of God becomes a complete panoply against all the ills that flesh is heir to. Yet this temper does not lead to quietism or to praise of quietism, but rather to eagerness for life, with all its ever-changing discipline of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. It becomes a man to 'push on against snow and rain,' to wish that the fountain of tears may never dry up, to find a

blessed boon in melancholy itself. This, in dull prose, is the meaning to be extracted from 'Restless Love,' 'Bliss of Melancholy,' 'The Divine,' and other well-known poems that need not be mentioned by name.

It is this profound ethicism, born of an inner longing for peace, nourished by the reading of Spinoza and finding solace in cosmic emotion, that distinguishes Goethe's lyric production in what I have chosen to regard as the second stage of its evolution. Here is something new in German poetry; something quite different from the ordinary naïve reaction to nature's more or less grateful aspects. If I mistake not we are here at the source, so far as modern poetry is concerned, of Wordsworth's

> sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
> A motion and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls thro' all things.

Many, it would seem, are insensitive to this kind of feeling. To Goethe, who first set it to music for the modern world, it brought a very genuine consolation.

It was but a phase of this pantheistic emotion that he could now find exhilaration in simply yielding to the *élan* of physical existence: in sweeping along on skates without a care, in courting the storm, and in communing alone with the bleak mountain solitudes in November. This desire to explore every nook and corner of possible experience and push out to the utmost periphery of it is the residuum of that wild passion for nature which

found such over-strained, at times almost insane, expression in 'Faust.' Clearly there was need of the sedative that came at Weimar in the routine of petty statecraft and the study of rocks and plants.

Did he also need the love of a married woman whom he could not take to wife? That is a question for the Delphic oracle—for the supermundane wisdom which alone sees the end from the beginning and can unravel the long and intricate complex of a man's life. One can easily imagine that a suitable marriage might have quickly laid the demons of unrest and have suffused his days with a quiet happiness. But in that case we should have had at any rate a very different Goethe. 'Iphigenie' and 'Tasso' would never have come into being as the world knows them, Faust would never have been disturbed by that dismal song crooned in his ears incessantly,

Thou shalt deny thyself, thou shalt deny,

and many a string of verses that tell of pain and struggle in language of enduring beauty would have remained unwritten. We should have heard less in his later years of the great gospel of renunciation. On the whole it seems better to be content with our poet as the Lord made him. Domestic bliss such as any philistine may aspire to might peradventure have spoiled him.

IV

From such verse as we have been considering, from the mystic soulfulness of Mignon's longings, the noble apotheosis of a spiritualized poetry in 'Dedication,' the humane aspiration of the 'Mysteries,'—from all this it seems a far cry indeed to the 'Roman Elegies.' We

know what had come between. It was Italy which had disenthralled the sensual man and turned his poetic feeling into the channels long ago worn by Tibullus and Propertius. Lord Byron in Italy presents himself to the imagination as a sick man finding a sad nepenthe for his trouble in the contemplation of the greater tragedy of Rome:

> Oh Rome, my country! City of the soul!
> The orphans of the heart must turn to thee,
> Lone mother of dead empires, and control
> In their shut breasts their petty misery.

Nothing of that in Goethe, altho it would seem to have been the most natural thing in the world. No hint anywhere of the old gnawing pain save as a thing of the distant past.

> Oh, how happy I am in Rome, when I think of the dismal
> Days of the distant North, wrapping me round in their folds,
> Think of the somber sky that ever lowered above me,
> Mind aweary and sad, world without color or form,
> While I, searching the ways of an ever unsatisfied spirit,
> Gloomily mused and moped, brooding over myself.

All that old misery has now been dispelled by the pagan gods, among whom Cupido plays the leading role. The Italian moon is brighter than the northern day.

The frank eroticism of the 'Roman Elegies' is mainly retrospective fiction, begotten not of a profligate life in Rome but of later transports of which Christiane Vulpius was the partner. The new tone was but a passing phase of Goethe's poetry, yet symptomatic of a profound change in his outlook on life. It ushers in what may best be called his pagan period, which comes to an end with

his mental excursion to the Orient. In prose its climacteric is the tribute to Winckelmann; in verse perhaps the 'Bride of Corinth,' one of the very best of German ballads.

In this middle stage of his career we find Goethe committed to a theory of poetry which, so far as I know, had not been definitely formulated before, tho kindred conceptions can perhaps be found here and there in earlier writers. It is the theory that the poet's great function is to discover and express the essential harmony that underlies the jangled multiplicity of life's phenomena. In his earlier years he had had no theory and had needed none. Feeling was all in all, and what made the poet—so it is said in 'Götz von Berlichingen'—was a heart completely filled with one emotion. But now that he had conquered his own unrest and made his way by painful struggles to inward peace and a serene enjoyment of life, what wonder if it seemed to him that the process was typical? That the essence of the poet's calling was *always* to seek out

> The central peace subsisting at the heart
> Of endless agitation.?

This view of the poet's function is set forth in a well-known passage of the Prelude to 'Faust':

> When on the spindle, spun to endless distance,
> By Nature's listless hand the thread is twirled,
> And the discordant tones of all existence
> In sullen jangle are together hurled,
> Who then the changeless orders of creation
> Divides and kindles into rhythmic dance?
> Who brings the one to join the general ordination,
> Where it may throb in grandest consonance?

The answer to the conundrum is the poet. The lines were probably written in 1798 or soon thereafter, but the idea had found lodgment in Goethe's mind some time before. We read in 'Tasso,' where the connection is such as to show that the words are meant to apply, not only to the author of 'Jerusalem Delivered,' but to all true poets whatsoever:

> His ear perceives the harmony of nature,
> What history affords and life presents,
> His willing breast absorbs incessantly;
> He gathers in his soul the widely sundered
> And with his feeling animates the dead.

It will not escape notice that the office here assigned to the poet is virtually the same as that usually assigned to the philosopher. For what are we to make of all the tropes about hearing the harmony of nature and absorbing the discordant manifoldness of the world to give it back in tuneful rhythms—what does it mean in plain prose but the effort of the thinking mind to find a unifying principle in the chaos of the phenomenal world? But this, one might almost say, is the central problem of philosophy. Can the quest succeed? Will it ever shout a final eureka? William James argued that, so far as solid facts go, the pluralistic view of the universe has more in its favor than the monism which was so dear to Goethe. Without attempting to labor the question I only remark that the theory under consideration makes of poetry something essentially calm, pensive, contemplative; for the spirit that would hear a transcendental harmony must not be agitated by storms of feeling. There is no room for the

ecstasies of passion, the intoxication of love, or the white heat of indignation. The poet's eye must not roll in a frenzy, glancing from heaven to earth and earth to heaven, but gaze steadily at the fixed order of the world.

That this conception of the poet's calling ever greatly affected the practice of Goethe in the lyric domain I am unable to see. Indeed there would be ground for surprise if it had, since song is not born of such sublimated philosophic ideas. The most we can say is that it fits in with, even if it does not account for, the pervading optimism and genial pensiveness of his later verse. One who had come to feel that the poet's great mission was to discover harmony at the heart of the world's discord, and withal to cherish his own equanimity as one of the greatest of blessings, was not likely to surrender himself to high emotional excitement or to dwell much in his imagination on the painful or the tragic. By nature he had little affinity for the tragic. He had now left his own tragic discord behind him and could look back on it as the happily landed mariner looks back on the perils and hardships of the voyage. What was more natural, then, than that he should come to look on all tragic emotions as but a necessary stage in the upward ascent to that high vantage-ground where one surveys the world in calm contemplation and lives in the emotions that make for enduring peace? In such terms he interpreted the career of Schiller, whose voyage had been unusually placid:

> For he was ours. So let the note of pride
> Hush into silence all the mourner's ruth;
> In our safe harbor he was fain to bide
> And build for aye after the storm of youth.

Even the tragic tale of the lovers in the 'Bride of Corinth' ends with a vista of peace at the last among the ancient gods, for whom forbidden love is no crime but the fruition of a natural desire:

> Let flames bring rest for aye to those who love!
> When the fire shall go,
> When the ashes glow,
> We hasten to the ancient gods above.

The contemplative bent of the aging Goethe, as of one listening to a far-away music and hence unmindful of the noises near at hand, not only fortified him against life's asperities but invested his more joyous moods with a certain pensive aloofness. To my thinking 'Ergo Bibamus' is supreme among drinking-songs in the German language. But how infinitely far it is from the ordinary Anacreontic strain! True the bibulous motive is there in the Latin refrain, but one feels that it is only poetic feigning. What the poet is driving at is evidently the duty of joy. In a gentle crescendo of feeling we seem to be wafted away from the earthly Bacchus and his works and borne aloft to some cloudland of pure aspiration:

> We pass thro' the portal, Joy guideth our ways,
> The clouds are agleam, there's a rift in the haze,
> A vision of loveliness fixes our gaze,
> We clink and we sing our *bibamus.*

V

If we leave out of account the Second Part of 'Faust,' a portion of the 'Divan,' and a number of personal and occasional poems, by far the larger part of the other verse written by Goethe during the last quarter of his life

is of the gnomic or epigrammatic order. Love of the aphorism and the epigram grew with his advancing years and he wrote an immense number of each. He was also given to noting down wise sayings of other men. In time he accumulated a large mass of gnomic utterances in prose and in verse, together with opinions, reflections, gibes, invectives, innuendoes, and all that sort of thing. Some were published during his lifetime, a large part not until long after his death. Many of the versicles would hardly have been published at all if his literary executors and the editors who came after them had been concerned to guard his reputation rather than to print every word that had ever fallen from his mouth or pen. What the world has, under the operation of the policy adopted, is a demonstration on a large scale that even a very great poet-thinker will inevitably accumulate much rubbish in his workshop, like any other craftsman, and that it were better he should burn it betimes lest it fall into the hands of a too reverent posterity.

But it were hardly fair to tax posterity alone for the poetic nullity of so much of the later verse that now occupies space in the complete editions of Goethe's works. He himself was quite capable of sinning against the Holy Ghost and regarding the result without a qualm of remorse. In the course of time he formed what may be called the riming habit. Verse-making was no longer a matter of *poetry* as he had once conceived it; not an affair of emotional fervor, of the lyric mood, or of happy inspiration, but rather of the day's work. He was a poet, people expected him to make verses; and he did make them—for autograph albums, for birthdays, weddings, and other occasions such as are wont to breed

unnecessary verse. Goethe attended to this business without much 'plaguing of the gracious Muses.' His 'Karlsbad Poems,' addressed to the Empress of Austria after he had basked in her favor a little while in 1810, are such as might have been produced by any court poet-aster—adulatory beyond measure and poetically mediocre. And there are others in this kind that can give no pleasure to the lover of poetry.

But the bane of his later years was not so much the outside demand for occasional verses as rather his habit of using the verse-form to record his mental reactions to everything under the sun. This habit inevitably called into being a vast quantity of verse which lacks the soul of poetry, albeit the gnomic type has an ancient and honorable history which prevents us from denying it the name of poetry altogether. He wrote it in his pursuit of intellectual culture—to clarify his ideas, to define his impressions, to portray his ego. What interested him, what was a true reflex of his individuality—whether in prose or verse did not greatly matter—was worth while. If critics did not like his ways they were welcome to think ill of him. He did not care. There is one of his 'Tame Xenia' which might be Englished without grave lese-majesty thus:

> Take my life in one big chunk,
> Precisely as I lead it;
> Other men sleep off their drunk,
> Mine's on paper—read it.

What has just been said of the later Goethe's verse implies nothing more than that he too, like Wordsworth and many another, needs to be read in a selection of what is best. Such an anthology, picking up a good song

here and there and drawing at will on the lyric portions of 'Faust' and the mellow Indian Summer of the 'Divan,' would show that the lyrism of an earlier day was not gone beyond recall. Minerva was not *always* unwilling. And such an anthology might also include a goodly number of gnomic versicles which, while they appeal to the sophisticated mind rather than to the general heart, are yet so good of their kind, so pithy and so wise, that they almost do the work of poetry and have rightly endeared themselves to a host of readers. And as for those arid stretches of unprofitable verse, let it be remembered at any rate that the Altmeister was under no illusions about what he was doing, in the literary any more than in the moral sphere. He once polished off the fault-finders thus:

> What you say is nothing new,
> Fallible I was and who can doubt it?
> But what you comic dullards say about it,
> I know it better than you.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DRAMATIST

By a dramatist let us here understand primarily a writer of plays to be acted or suitable for acting. I say primarily, not wishing to press my definition in a doctrinaire spirit. The closet-drama, as it is called, may be well worth while as literature, and good literature is a flower to be prized wherever we find it growing. Nothing is gained by giving the literary drama a bad name. If a writer feels inwardly impelled to the dialog form, likes to divide his matter into so-called acts and scenes and to provide for exits and entrances, by all means let him follow his bent, even if he have no commission from either dramatic muse or choose to renounce the honors of the stage. There is surely room in the world for every form of art that is capable of giving genuine pleasure to anyone. I have no quarrel even with those who say they find it more edifying to read a great play than to see it acted.

Nevertheless it is true that drama was originally something *done* for the entertainment of spectators, and such must always continue to be its essential character. First and foremost it is a communal function, only secondarily a form of literary self-expression. Its business is to interest and hold the spectator. To do that is its highest merit, not to do that its gravest shortcoming. Here and nowhere else is the great criterion in matters of

the art dramatic. A song may give pleasure as literature, may delight a deaf person; still, that which makes it delightful is a certain quality—we call it lyric—which ultimately reduces to singableness. And just as the highest test of a song is singableness, so the highest test of a play is playableness.

I

But now it happens that the spectator, that courted fellow-being who is to be interested and held, is a highly variable personage. He varies with the time and place, with the quality of his taste, with the degree of his education and refinement. In fact, he is only an abstraction, like the economic man, or like the benevolent reader to whom authors used to address their books. A modern British scholar has expressed the opinion that a Greek audience such as assembled in the theater of Dionysos at Athens to see a play of Sophocles was equal in average intelligence to the British House of Commons. This may be so, or it may not; there is no way of settling the question positively. But what all must agree to is that the Athenian audience was at least very different from that which gathered, say, at the Globe Theater in London to see a new play of Shakspere; just as this too was very different from the crowd that flocked to see a medieval passion-play. What held the one audience spell-bound would have driven away the other in bewilderment and disgust.

The difference is not merely of language, religion, and social organization. What interests the spectator in a theater is always dependent on the *mores* of the community—that unfelt but irresistible network of habit

and tradition that holds us all in bondage. To suppose that there are any eternal verities of human nature capable of yielding universal principles of dramatic art is to make a supposition that runs counter to all history and all psychology. Just now, in a considerable portion of the Occident, there is an insistent demand for what is called fidelity to life. But if by that phrase we mean the life actually lived by the spectators, it is to be said, speaking broadly, that that is precisely what they do not want and never have wanted. There is no doctrine, rule or definition that is applicable to all times and places. Drama is a vindication of the *mores* under trial, and the *mores* are infinitely various.

These observations are meant to suggest the point of view from which Goethe is here to be regarded as a dramatist. He is to be considered as a playwright, and so far as he was not a good playwright his limitations are to be frankly pointed out without too much awe of his general literary prestige, which was due only in small part to his work for the theater. At the same time it is to be borne in mind that there are no absolute standards in the dramatic sphere, and that every writer of plays is the product of his race, epoch, and surroundings. Goethe was a German, of the eighteenth century, the inheritor of particular traditions, a resident for the most part of a small town, where life was in some ways parochial. What is perhaps most important of all to remember is that his plays did not grow out of the needs of a theater, except the few unimportant ones that were called into being by the exigencies of the amateurs at Weimar.

On the whole it was no very large part of his energy

that went to the making of plays. In his youth he completed eight productions in the dramatic form and began several others that he never finished. Of the eight, three were five-act plays sufficient in mere quantity for an evening's entertainment. These are 'Götz,' 'Clavigo,' and 'Stella.' 'The Fellow-culprits,' a three-act rogues' comedy in alexandrine verse, is playable, but it has rarely been played, except at Weimar under the eye of its author, who had a fondness for it. The others of the eight hardly rise above the plane of bagatelles. The 'Lover's Wayward Humor' might do at a pinch for a curtain-raiser. 'Gods, Heroes, and Wieland' is a thin literary skit dashed off in a few hours. 'Satyros' and 'Pater Brey' are satirical take-offs whose interest is altogether local and personal. They could not be played unless it were before an audience of *Goetheforscher*. The tale thus reduces to three major plays, one of which, 'Stella,' is unavailable for the stage because of the abysmal uninterestingness of its hero.

The next ten years, Goethe's first decade in Weimar, brought forth 'Brother and Sister,' 'Lila,' the 'Birds,' and one or two other trifles for local consumption. They have virtually no stage history outside of Weimar. To this period also belong 'Iphigenie,' 'Tasso,' and 'Egmont' —three plays in which a rare but not pre-eminently dramatic genius found expression. After that there are no more works that are of importance from our present point of view. The 'Grand-Cophta' is without distinction of any kind, save that Goethe wrote it, and the completed part of the 'Natural Daughter,' while rich in poetry, is theatrically null. There remain a few musical plays of which the inspiration is lyric, and a

long dramatic poem which is admittedly the masterpiece of German poetry. But while 'Faust' is often played and has its own fascination on the stage, it has won the world for reasons not connected with its dramatic power.

So Goethe's total achievement in this field amounts to half a dozen plays that are actable. In such a number there is certainly no suggestion of remarkable opulence. When one recalls that Sophocles wrote more than a hundred, Euripides nearly a hundred, Shakspere forty, Molière over thirty, and Ibsen over twenty, not to mention Lope de Vega's imputed eighteen hundred, it is plain that Goethe does not belong in the company of great dramatists remarkable for their fecundity. His playmaking was always an avocation; it never claimed the entire man except for a few weeks at a time. Of the six or seven plays just referred to, only one, 'Clavigo,' was made at a single casting of the fluid material. The others were the result of interrupted efforts extending over periods ranging from two years to sixty.

II

Aside from the artistic genius of a gifted individual two factors seem to be pre-eminently necessary for the production of notable drama: first, a large and stirring public life; second, a flourishing theater. These conditions have been present wherever dramatic works of permanent interest—such as we vaguely call great—have come into being. Without the large and stirring public life the would-be dramatist is apt to remain parochial in his outlook and can hardly create that which will carry beyond the bounds of his own time and place. It is often said nowadays that the common man—tinker,

clodhopper, or sot—may be made as interesting for the purposes of art as the potentate or the large adventurer; that the secret lies in the *how* rather than the *what*. The doctrine may have a certain validity in the domain of prose fiction, but in the drama, broadly speaking, it is not true. Taken away from its time and place the parochial tragedy or comedy makes dull entertainment on the boards. Such interest as it now and then has for persons of the larger outlook is apt to be due to the felt contrast between the little world and the great. Or perhaps there is an unconscious effort to find in the little world a symbol of the great. In either case the great world is the real psychological basis of the effect produced.

The second factor, a flourishing theater, is as vital to the drama as an orchestra to orchestral music. It is the medium in which the dramatist has his being, the instrument on which he plays. For him to know human nature in its individual reactions is not enough; he must also be an expert in the mass-suggestion of the stage. This expertness, involving as it does the results of experience, comes only with experience. The great playwrights have generally been professional men wedded to a calling which was their life. Often actors themselves or at any rate working in conjunction with actors, they have made the theater while at the same time the theater was making them. Along with an assured technic in minor matters they acquired a knowledge of those broad effects which appeal permanently to human nature because they drive at large issues. It is thus that the grand style in drama has everywhere been developed. When the way has been shown by the great professional

playwrights it may be followed with more or less of insight by dilettanti who are not of the theatrical guild. Even the grand style may be copied, but the counterfeit is quickly detected.

Now if we look at Goethe's environment with respect to these two prime factors of great dramatic art we shall see that it was decidedly unfavorable. He had indeed by nature or acquired in boyhood a strong bent for the dramatic form of expression. It was not an exclusive bent, for the song and the story attracted him almost equally. But the play was usually that which engaged his more ambitious musings, and so strong and persistent was his impulse in that direction that it might well have been taken for the call of destiny.

But given a potentially great German dramatist in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, where was he to get the practical schooling of the stage, and what was he to write about? The drama, as a dignified form of art in which persons of intelligence could take an interest, was a new thing in the Germany of that day. It was hardly out of its swaddling-clothes even at Leipsic, where it had lately been born under the fostering care of Professor Gottsched and Madame Neuber. As is well known, they took their cue from France. It was here, in connection with this puny theater at Leipsic, that young Lessing served his apprenticeship to the stage in the two years just preceding Goethe's birth. He wrote half a dozen prose comedies in the French style, calling his characters by such names as Damis, Chrysander, Theophrast, Wumshäter (woman-hater), and so forth. They are the best plays written by any German at that time, but they have nothing to do with German life.

Types of character, plots, situations, intrigues, all bear the stamp of a literary importation.

Some five years later, having meanwhile read omnivorously in the literature of the drama, ancient and modern, Lessing wrote his 'Miss Sara Sampson' as an experiment in middle-class tragedy. There was no reason for giving such an experiment an English setting, save that he had been reading Lillo, Congreve, and Richardson. By this time he had become deeply interested in the theory of tragedy and was working toward the conclusion that the German taste in matters dramatic was more akin to the English genius than to the French. Hence his savage attack, in the 'Letters on Literature' (1759), on the French proclivities of Gottsched, and a little later, in the 'Hamburg Dramaturgy' (1767-1768), his vigorous assault on the French classical tragedy itself. Here his main thesis was that the French dramatists, while professing to follow the canons of Aristotle, had really misconceived him and failed to arouse the emotions of pity and fear, whereas Shakspere, knowing nothing of the Stagyrite's rules, had nevertheless attained in a very eminent degree the very end which the rules had in view.

Lessing's critical writings, fortified by the creative masterstroke of 'Minna von Barnhelm,' quickly brought the question of a 'national' German drama to the forefront of public interest. Playhouses and dramatic criticism began to abound. Meanwhile a much-needed emancipative influence was at work in Herder and the so-called storm-and-stress. The inveterate habit of looking to France was at last breaking down, and many were looking to England instead. But what was to be

gained, said Herder in effect, by substituting one alien tyranny for another? What, even if the new tyranny vaunted the authority of a better-understood Aristotle? Who was Aristotle anyway? For Lessing he was nature's infallible law-giver. For Herder he was simply a Greek of a particular period, who had seen a certain type of serious drama evolved out of peculiar national conditions, and had then ably explained how the plays were made. But the great desideratum, said Herder, was that the Germans should imitate no one, follow no one's rules, but be themselves and express their own national genius.

Thus there were three currents of opinion and practice with regard to the drama. First, the French classic tradition still had its friends, among whom, for a while at least, was Wieland. Secondly, there were the storm-and-stress playwrights who wrote formless tragedies of disordered passion, calling them, rather curiously, by the name of 'English.' Finally, there was a current best represented by Lessing's 'Emilia Galotti.' This, while employing prose and dealing with modern life, laid stress on a closely knit and well-ordered plot and aimed to follow the principles, if not the rules, of Aristotle.

In all this effort conservatives and radicals alike were dreaming of a new 'national' drama. But a national art implies a nation, and there was no such thing as a German nation. No tie save that of language, and that but imperfectly, united the many separate states of which the empire was composed. These states were ruled for the most part by autocratic princelings who were without horizon and hide-bound in the vicious traditions of their class. There was no public life or body of interests that could justly be called national. No city focused

the intellectual life of the German-speaking people as a whole. For centuries there had been no real national heroes, no epochs felt as glorious. Organized religion had become an unlovely affair of contentious creeds that no longer thrilled to great emotions. There were no august traditions anywhere. That exultant feeling of nationality, which breathes in the literature of all the great epochs did not exist. Only the germs of it were there in the excitement produced by the victories of Frederick the Great.

III

Such was the conjuncture in which Goethe's youth fell. What wonder if he found his themes, not in the conflicts of the great world, in deeds of high emprize, or the clash of impetuous wills, but in the inner crises of the soul? His earliest impressions of the stage came to him from the French plays that he saw in Frankfort when he was a boy of eight or nine. So long as he lived there the town had no German theater. Hence an early set of his mind toward the alexandrine form, which in German, from the very nature of the language, is undramatic—a bookish thing, like the sonnet. It is capable of stately effects and of pretty effects; but it can not be made to talk and its mincing gait is fatal to all vigorous dramatic expression. The verse never seems to come from the heart, but only from the art-conscious head. So we may pass by Goethe's alexandrine plays as nothing more than literary experiments in a waning fashion.

It is different with 'Götz von Berlichingen,' which is quite untrammeled by any obtrusive art. The general

effect of Goethe's sojourn at Strassburg was to make an end, for the time being, of all his French prepossessions. Reading Shakspere and listening to Herder's gospel of a full-blooded national art, he had come to a state of mind which was very like an explosion of wrath at the fool's paradise in which he had been cultivating the literary amenities. Particularly he seems to have been troubled by the unities and the verse-form of the older drama and by its tenuous plots, which reflected only the life of the gentry and but a little of that. The violence of his revolt is a bit surprising in view of the fact that it was perfectly natural and involved no claims that were not readily admissible. That a young writer may try experiments in defiance of convention is one of the literary rights of man which no one can gainsay. Life would hardly be tolerable if it were not so.

It should never be forgotten in thinking of Goethe as a playwright that 'Götz von Berlichingen' was nothing but a literary experiment. It was not written for the stage, the possibility of its being acted did not figure in its author's thoughts. There is no evidence that he was even languidly interested in the theater at the time of writing it. Some three or four years before, while a student at Leipsic, he had seen a few plays, but there is nothing in his letters to indicate that he was particularly interested in the histrionic art. Certainly he was not stage-struck, as young Lessing had been in the same place twenty years before. For Goethe the theater was just a casual diversion, not an institution that he thought it worth while to study.

Nor did the stage come into his purview during his illness and convalescence, or afterwards at Strassburg

under Herder's tuition. Herder was a bookman peculiarly lacking in the dramatic gift; a preacher, teacher, and theorist who saw everything from the historical point of view and could hardly have written a playable scene to save his life. In his enthusiasm for Shakspere what Herder saw was the opulence of the national poet, his immense variety, his wonderful ensembles, capable of thrilling the solitary reader with a sense of life's torrential grandeur. For Shakspere as a stage artist engaged in the business of providing entertainment for an audience in a theater, Herder had no eye at all.

So it was that when the home-coming student, finding himself with time on his hands in dull Frankfort—no theater anywhere around—set about 'dramatizing' an old autobiography for his own amusement, it was a purely literary problem that he attacked.

What he proposed to do was to make an epoch of the German past relive in its fulness, variety, and characteristic flavor. This could best be done, he thought, in a series of dramatic pictures showing Götz in his total environment; in the stress of his turbulent life, in his relation to his own household, to his retainers, and to the outside world. Of course the character of Götz had to be treated sympathetically; this meant that the intrinsically odious system of private warfare must be invested with an idealizing halo, and that the organs of the state, the church, and the law must be presented in an unfavorable light. Hence the conception of Götz as a martyr to liberty, which in reality he was not at all. Hence also the invention, as a foil to the loyal Götz, of the treacherous Weislingen, and of the dazzling coquet Adelheid, who was needed to work Weislingen's fall.

In working out his details with the pen the young enthusiast thought precious little of the convenience of actors or of how his ensemble would strike a spectator. Why should he have thought of these things when what he was doing was just a private affair of his own? If the separate scenes were vigorously drawn, had the savor of life, and were true to the spirit of the epoch, what mattered it whether they were all duly motivated and logically connected? What mattered it whether the divers separate effects converged to a total effect at the end? It had not been so in life, why then should it be so in the picture, which was a copy of life? Why put on fetters of any kind in writing something which was not to be played and whose interest was to be a diffused pictorial interest?

The breezy radicalism that pervades 'Götz,' together with the honest life-likeness of the scenes, proved to be its strength with the public. It is a play without great characters, great action, great passion, or great thought. For who can be much impressed in the long run by the fine talk about freedom, when it means freedom to kidnap, rob, and kill? Love plays a rather uninspiring role, religion and patriotism none whatever. The outstanding emotion is that of personal loyalty. There are no large issues except that of public order, as to which one is expected to take the wrong side. The language is conversational prose, realistically shaded to the social status of the speakers and to the nature of the business in hand. So we miss the appeal of noble diction, even as we miss the other lures of the grand style.

And yet, just because the effort to achieve the grand style by imitation had degenerated in the hands of Ger-

man writers into an empty formalism which had no room in it for the red blood of human nature—just for this reason the freshness of 'Götz von Berlichingen' proved irresistibly attractive to the public of that day. A better play from the technical point of view, such a play as the author of 'Emilia Galotti' might have approved, would inevitably have proved thinner in substance and so have failed to arouse the enthusiasm of the literary insurrectos who now fell into line behind Goethe as their acknowledged leader.

And after all, there was a species of higher wisdom in the general formula of 'Götz,' for what average spectators in the theater demand is to be interested all along in what is going on at the moment—not to be emotionally prepared for something that is coming at the end of the fifth act. It is only the sophisticated critic, thinking it over afterwards as he examines the text under his study-lamp, who is much given to philosophizing and scanning the details to see whether they are all in harmony with the approved rules of dramatic art. This accounts for such moderate popularity as 'Götz' has enjoyed and still continues to enjoy on the stage. It set the vogue for a loosely constructed prose play which should aim at variety and verisimilitude rather than at artistic perfection. The new type embodied the very theatrical wisdom to which Goethe later gave expression by the mouth of the Director in the Prelude to 'Faust.'

'Tis mass alone by which you reach the masses.

IV

In his old age Goethe said to Eckermann in effect that he might have gone on and written a dozen other

plays in the style of 'Götz von Berlichingen.' But this was probably an illusion; one does not see where they could have come in. He had shot his bolt, and it was the only one in his quiver of that particular kind. He was not yet so interested in large public affairs that he could have found pleasure in writing more plays having to do with the Holy Roman Empire. Political and ecclesiastical tyranny did not really come home to him as a citizen of Frankfort. And hopeless fighting in a past age of anarchy was not really to his taste as it developed in the days of his youth.

Not that the spirit of revolt in him was quelled or had become quiescent; it was still there as a smoldering fire that might and did break out in new flames of tragic conflict between the passion for freedom and its powerful enemies. But it came over him that the problem was much broader and deeper than he had shown it in his belligerent knight of the sixteenth century. There were graver obstacles to man's freedom than the petty tyrannies and oppressions of a long-past epoch; worse adversaries than a dull-witted bishop, a treacherous poltroon of a courtier, and a beautiful scheming widow. The great enemy was the nature of things, the total pressure of life.

So his new or amplified formula for tragedy became something like this: a disastrous struggle of the individual with his environment in the effort to live out his own life in his own way. The environment might be, as it had been in 'Götz,' the arrangements of human society at a particular epoch, but it might also be the irremediable nature of things. Revolt against the power and authority of the king of the gods was to have been the tragic

motive of 'Prometheus.' Revolt against the limitations of human knowledge and the jejuneness of a purely intellectual existence was the starting-point of 'Faust'; only there the patient was to be cured instead of chafing himself to death against the chains. Such a conception of the tragic could make little use of virile strong-willed heroes, like Julius Cæsar or Mahomet; it was better served by moral weaklings whose weakness might become their tragic guilt. But men who do not know their own minds, are pulled this way and that by volatile impulse or bad advice, and come to some bad end from mere lack of ordinary stamina, can not easily be made interesting on the stage. They approach too near the pathological.

It was therefore unfortunate for Goethe's prestige as a dramatist that, after the brilliant literary success of 'Götz von Berlichingen,' his thoughts ran more and more on characters of the Weislingen and Werther type, so that he was led to turn his hand to the writing of such plays as 'Clavigo' and 'Stella.' The predilection is easy to account for, perhaps it was inevitable. Having himself a dubious record of inconstancy in love, eager to make the most of life in some way not yet clearly defined, jealous of his freedom, he was just the man to agonize over the marriage question. To be linked to one woman for good and all was a fate that had terrible possibilities, and yet woman was a necessity of his existence. So his imagination was captivated by the figure of the fickle lover, whom his mind's eye saw in divers shapes and situations, in various degrees of moral delinquency. Man's inconstancy to woman became for

him, it is hardly too much to say, *the* root of tragic misfortune.

All this is psychologically intelligible enough, but the fickle lover, especially when his fickleness is all there is of him, is a poor asset for the dramatist, unless it were in farce. By no finesse of art can he be made largely interesting. Off the stage society is rather tolerant of inconstancy; under circumstances we approve it. But no one, not even the radicals who rail at monogamous marriage itself, regards it as admirable. Hence it is that in the serious drama, which is a vindication of the *mores* under trial, the fickle lover repels sympathy. Even when he has a case before the bar of reason we do not care to hear it publicly tried on the stage.

In 'Clavigo' the heart of the matter is the tragic fate of an ambitious youth whose career is going to be endangered by his engagement to a sickly girl. In such a situation a degree of hesitancy on the part of the lover is not only permissible but a plain dictate of duty. To marry an invalid suffering from organic disease is unethical conduct, tho it is well to remember that eugenic considerations were not much taken into account in the sentimental age of the eighteenth century, whether in life or in art. So we have in 'Clavigo' a tragedy in which the hero has no full-fledged tragic guilt. He does not really deserve his fate. His only fault consists in his vacillating, belying himself, and giving wrong reasons for right conduct. In the end he is killed in a duel by Marie's impetuous brother, who imagines that his sister has died of a broken heart.

How 'Clavigo' came into being as the result of a sudden freak is known from 'Poetry and Truth.'

It was written in a week to meet the jesting challenge of the temporary 'wife' whom Goethe happened to be paired with in a young folks' marriage game. As the by-product of a social frolic it is hardly a mark for grave criticism. While technically a well-made play it is quite without any distinction of style or any large import. There is nothing in it of the world's inevitable woe. It was seldom played in Goethe's lifetime and would hardly be played now at all but for the glamor of its author's name.

In the case of 'Stella,' a product of the troublous year 1775, there has been a still more decided rejection by the stage. And no wonder, for it is quite impossible to make the play largely interesting, even as parlor drama. For tragedy it is too farcical, for farce, too solemn.

V

After the year 1775 Goethe's dramatic writings savor strongly of his new environment. At Weimar he came into relations, in a small way, with the business of play-acting, that being a favorite amusement of the court circle. It was only natural that the author of several published plays should be called in as chief consultant when a performance was to be given. He also tried himself as an actor. The result of all this experience was that when, in 1791, the duke decided to rely no longer on the strolling companies but to have a theater of his own, he made Goethe director of it. But those amateur performances were very simple indeed. The associations of the English word 'court' are quite misleading in connection with little Weimar, where every-

thing was on a duodecimo scale, poverty the permanent officer of the day, and national feeling all but non-existent. There was a small bevy of the gentry who were interested in the amenities, and there was a bourgeois 'public' that might on occasion fill a small drawing-room. The birthday of the duke or duchess, the arrival of a blue-blooded guest, someone's little journey to another place, was an event.

Under such circumstances the making of theatrical masterpieces for the outside world would have been impossible for a man like Goethe, even if his thoughts had turned in that direction. It is true that Schiller afterwards found the Weimar conditions favorable enough; but Schiller had a rare talent for visualizing the great issues of other days and other lands, whereas Goethe was dependent on his own experience. He was a born 'confessor' and could write effectively only of that which concerned him. But what concerned him at Weimar, apart from official duties and social relaxation, was the improvement of his ego. It was the problem of curing his faults, acquiring wisdom, and working out a sane philosophy of individual perfection. This meant introspection and self-comparison. It meant the study of character and motive as manifested, not so much in public crises of the kind called dramatic—those which stir the imagination of all men everywhere—but rather in the soul-crises of gifted individuals needing to learn wisdom in order to steer their course wisely among their fellow-men.

So Goethe at Weimar became a specialist in personal culture and wrote for a little cotery of specialists like himself who would understand him; turning his atten-

tion not to world-events, or deeds of high emprize, or the clash of great historic forces, but to eccentricities of personal character reacting to such trials and tribulations as he himself had felt and observed.

Now it is in this subtle and illuminating criticism of life that Goethe's value for the modern man is mainly to be found. But such is not the stuff of which great plays are made. The human drama itself began, not with reflections but with acts to satisfy needs. The reflections were secondary—came limping after. The characteristic excitement of drama is the excitement of seeing men dare and do and win or lose—not the opportunity of hearing them expose and expound their soul-states or debate the pros and cons of their enterprise. Hence the hall-mark of great drama is visible action under the stress of primal emotions whose driving force is at once understood by everybody. Intellectual fencing and delicate analysis of emotional states are not effective on the stage except so far as they are obviously related to notable action. The sophisticated spectator will prefer to get his philosophy by reading and meditation, while the unsophisticated spectator is bewildered and bored.

In one respect what has just been said does not apply to 'Egmont,' for the death of Egmont *was* a tragedy in the life of a nation. As we have seen, the play was begun by Goethe at Frankfort in 1775 and completed some thirteen years later. From his references to it in 'Poetry and Truth' and later in conversations with Eckermann one can see how little he was concerned with the facts of history. The real Egmont was hardly in his mind at all. His play is a dramatic study of a

'demonic' character bearing the name of Egmont. As such it is highly interesting to read, and if we except portions of 'Faust' it presents Goethe's dramatic gift at its very best. But on the stage 'Egmont' drags. It somehow lacks 'go.' There is too much reasoning and there are scenes that have no very obvious bearing on the main issue. They are there evidently as character-studies. Moreover, such an Egmont as Goethe drew, so frivolous in his infatuation for a love-lorn girl while great issues are pending, so blind to the obvious in his light-hearted egotism, must inevitably fail to win that profounder tragic sympathy which we bestow on the heroes of great tragedy—say on Oedipus and Lear and Wallenstein. One has a vague feeling that *such* an Egmont is hardly worth agonizing over. Schiller was eternally right in feeling that the real Egmont of history was a far more tragic figure than the spurious Egmont of Goethe's imagination.

The perfect fruitage of Goethe's dramatic gift, as grown in the Weimar hot-house and ripened in the sun of Italy, is to be tasted in 'Iphigenie' and 'Tasso.' Both these plays have an enduring literary charm which lures the reader back again and again to a never-failing pleasure. It is the charm of exquisitely modulated language, of soulful poetry, of high refinement in thought and feeling. In virtue of these distinctions they are precious classics of literature. And they are unique. There is nothing else like them anywhere. As for their acting quality it has been abundantly shown that, given an audience caring greatly for the refinements of literary expression, and given players fully imbued with the Goethean spirit in this particular phase of it, 'Iphigenie'

and 'Tasso' make good entertainment on the stage. But their effect is that of exquisite art, not that of nature mirrored. The spectator is never carried away by any rush of elemental human feeling.

It is not, as used to be said, that these plays are cold or statuesque—an idea which must have been due to poor acting or else to an inert imagination. They are surcharged with feeling and there is action enough of a certain kind; but it is of the kind natural to people habituated to self-control and having the poise of high refinement. Such folk have their own modes of expression, which may seem cold to the uninitiated and yet be tense with emotion. A gesture, an intonation, a luminous phrase uttered with a certain modulation of the voice, may tell more of inner excitement than do the bustle and vociferation of the natural man. To refinement it is the movements of the spirit, rather than those of the body, that count. But the movements of the spirit are not dramatic.

If then we say that the hall-mark of great drama is to engage and hold the interest of all sorts of men, it must be admitted that 'Iphigenie' and 'Tasso' are not great plays, because they lack human breadth. How rich is 'Tasso' in poetry and philosophy and refined amenity, how poor in dramatic substance! A brooding poet with a deficient sense of reality is held in high honor at a petty court. Everyone flatters and coddles him. The mania of persecution begins to afflict him; he imagines that everyone has turned against him, becomes morbidly desperate. Finally, in a tense moment, not of amorous passion, but of general despair over the imagined necessity of leaving his place of residence, he

forgets the proprieties and kisses a princess. Then he *must* go away.—How can ordinary human nature become greatly excited over such a matter when it is enacted on the 'boards that signify the world'?

With the completion of 'Tasso' in 1789 the career of Goethe as a writer of plays available for the stage came to an end. During his long directorate of the Weimar theater, when he was constantly scanning the horizon for good plays, he himself failed to produce one. The 'Natural Daughter' was played, but once was enough, as was later the case also with 'Epimenides.' There are scenes in the Second Part of 'Faust' which produce a noble effect on the stage, but it is due to their pictorial symbolism. Speaking broadly of the later Goethe, we may say that the poet, the philosopher, the man of science, the critic of life, had wandered away from the broad highways of thought and feeling where ordinary men are wont to travel. This unfitted him to be a dramatist.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NOVELIST

In this chapter we shall be occupied with Goethe as a story-teller in prose, his shorter as well as his longer tales being included under a single rubric. Interesting attempts have been made to set out the short story as a literary type by itself, differing in technic as well as in quantity from the novel. I recognize the distinction as valid, but the matter need not concern us here, any more than the difference between a novel and a romance. Goethe wrote three major stories such as the Germans call *Romane* and we commonly know as novels. Two of these are among the most famous literary productions of the eighteenth century. He also wrote a number of short stories of different kinds and theorized to some extent on the narrative art. In speaking of him as a novelist I wish to include this entire phase of his literary work. Fictionist would be a better word for my purpose if only it were in more common use.

The publication of the 'Sufferings of Young Werther' in 1774 gave the world something new in prose fiction. Nothing like it in kind, nothing approaching it in artistic power, had been written before in German or in any other language. Yet it was not altogether new; for it had its literary antecedents in the sense that the literary values it exploited had been exploited before.

The feeling for them was latent in the temper of the time, else the novel could not have achieved its immense popularity. What Goethe did was to gather the scattered lights together and focus them on the case of a single imaginary sufferer.

Let us glance at the literary conjuncture of the time in its relation to prose fiction.

I

In Germany there was simply no tradition at all—nothing that could afford help or guidance. Wieland had lately emerged into view as a story-teller, but apart from his writings no German fiction of even tolerable merit had come into being for a hundred years. Back in the seventeenth century exotic romance of the stilted and pedantic order had flourished for a while in the hands of the Silesians and had even held its own in a feeble way after Grimmelshausen had blazed a new trail in 'Simplicissimus,' the first German novel that is based on experience and observation. But Grimmelshausen had no successors and the older romance gradually lost what little favor it had once enjoyed. Thus the vigorous German appetite for fiction became more and more dependent on translations and imitations.

In the second quarter of the eighteenth century 'Robinson Crusoe' begat a numerous German progeny—the so-called Robinsonades, which exploited the remote and the strange. These tales of lonely adventure in far-away lands had this in common with the earlier stilted romance that they were both purely imaginative. The authors knew nothing except from books of what they undertook to tell about.

Then came the turn of Richardson and the lacrimose family novel. 'Pamela' and especially 'Clarissa' and 'Grandison' were widely read in Germany and bore their part in ushering in the sentimental age. Here for the first time was a genuine bourgeois fiction that seemed to deal with the now and here. As literature for the guidance of young women in the ways of virtuous propriety it was both edifying and interesting—especially to women, who were now becoming an important part of the reading public. Richardson's heroines furnished models of character and conduct. A young lady asked herself how Pamela or Clarissa or Henrietta would have behaved under the circumstances. An early poem of Goethe describes the charm of maidenhood as 'more than Byron, more than Pamela.' Richardson's moralizing bent captured a multitude of readers in social strata that had previously cared little for fiction or had regarded it as dangerous.

The salient feature of the new literature was that it focused attention on a heroine—a young woman exposed to the wiles of the seducer. The situation was seen for the first time from her point of view. Her triumph was the preservation of her virtue amid the pitfalls of a wicked world. The epistolary form lent itself admirably to the analysis and exposition of her mental states. The man in the case was usually of little account, whereas in the earlier romances he had been everything.

A different turn was taken by Wieland, whose inspiration came from France and Spain. His first essay in prose fiction, 'Don Sylvio' (1764), was a take-off on the romance of chivalry, its hero being, like him of La Mancha, a man obsessed by an illusion and moving about

in a world unrealized. The tale has something of the mellow irony—that spirit of persiflage at the expense of enthusiasm—which was to be Wieland's specialty in the years to come. But it lacks reality. The belief in fairies was a manufactured issue which it was now hard to take seriously. What had honest and aspiring folk to do with a far-away Spanish prince and his fantastic lunacy? A similar impression of remoteness must have been produced by Wieland's later tales, 'Agathon' and the 'Golden Mirror' and the 'Abderites,' set as they were in Ancient Greece or in the Orient. As a matter of fact Wieland was talking to his contemporaries and trying to inculcate a sane and temperate view of life. But his works were a species of cipher that had to be translated into modern terms, and they were not altogether free from the besetting German sin of pedantry. If it was Wieland who weaned the South Germans from an exclusively French literary diet we can at any rate understand why the pabulum he offered them did not long prove appetizing.

In none of these currents of fiction was there any serious quarrel with the social order as such. It was regarded as a part of the nature of things, and the nature of things was unassailable. The popular philosophy taught that this world is the best of possible worlds, all things having been wisely preordained for man's comfort and convenience. If any particular man did not find them comfortable and convenient it was his fault. That the social order was not a part of the nature of things at all, but a miserable perversion of it—this idea came in with Rousseau, tho premonitory mutterings of it can be heard before his time. The 'New Eloise' came

out in 1760, when its author was already a famous man. It was widely read in Germany and set men thinking everywhere.

II

Such was the literary firmament in which the 'Sufferings of Young Werther' suddenly blazed out in the year 1774. Since that time several generations of bookmen have busied themselves with the melancholy tale, studying it and commenting on it from every conceivable point of view. There is a literature dealing with the originals of the characters and the actual happenings which suggested the story; another devoted to the Werther craze and the swift popularization of the tale in Germany and other lands; and still another relating to its style and technic and the various influences and 'motives' that went to the making of it. To go again into these trite matters here would be wearisome. What stands out conspicuous in the retrospect is the fact that a tale of despair and suicide, a study reflecting, not its author's philosophy but his transient moods of youthful hypochondria, a tale with whose imputed tendency almost every reader found fault, and of which its author soon became half-ashamed—that such a tale so quickly bit itself into the imagination of Europe and in becoming a by-word became a classic. If one asks how this could come about the answer must be found somehow in the art with which the story is told.

This art, be it observed, was largely unconscious—a case of *hinwühlen* comparable to the automatic writing of persons in a trance. As a rational being Goethe hardly knew what he was doing when he wrote the

story. There are no calculated effects such as one can easily detect in his later fiction. The letters seem to well up spontaneously, like all good letters, and to be their author's private affair. They produce a real illusion of biography. There is no speculation on the public taste, no imitation, so far as the general make-up of the story is concerned, of anything that had gone before. Many a hint is indeed taken from predecessors, notably from Richardson and Rousseau, but on the whole these writers serve rather as beacon-lights to warn away than as models to follow.

The first notable distinction of 'Werther' is the impassioned fervor of the style. The book is aglow from beginning to end—something that can be said of no previous German fiction. Passion had hitherto spoken the affected language of gallantry or else the restrained language of conventional wooing. Günther had indeed *sung* of love as if it were madness, but no prose writer had shown a man losing his head over the sexual attraction. As for Richardson, it was not his affair to set forth the delirium of love or any other delirium, while his imitators from Gellert on were sober moralists for whom anything of that kind would have been quite out of the question. Nor was the dialect of passion in the power of Wieland, or Sophie La Roche, or any other German novelist in the third quarter of the eighteenth century.

It *was* in the power of Rousseau, however, and from him the infection spread; from him

> who threw
> Enchantment over passion and from woe
> Wrung overwhelming eloquence.

It was Rousseau who first imparted a hectic flush to the romance of love and made people feel that the lover's *délire* and *ivresse,* being natural, must also be divine. Goethe knew his Rousseau, but had no need of Rousseau to teach him the artistic value of emotional vehemence. That feeling is all in all and art its expression was the main article of his youthful creed.

So we find Werther always in a quiver of excitement. Even before he gets his first glimpse of the angelic Lotte cutting bread and butter his sensitive soul hardly knows a moment's calm. A bit of woods, a chain of hills, the nestling valleys, arouse in him a rapturous desire to go and mingle his being with theirs and give himself up to the 'bliss of one single, great, glorious emotion.' And then—'when we hasten thither and *there* becomes *here,* alas, everything is as it was: we stand in our poverty, our limitation, and our soul pines for the refreshment that has escaped us.' Not only does he long for great emotions that evade him, but the unexcited state of others fills him with disgust. He feels that he cuts a silly figure in society when anyone asks him how he likes Lotte. 'Likes! How I hate the word! What kind of a fellow must he be who likes Lotte? whose senses and feelings are not completely filled with her? Likes! Lately someone asked me how I *liked* Ossian.'

It is this intense preoccupation with his own feelings, this violent oscillation of the emotional balance-tongue, that constitutes Werther's character. His character and at the same time his tragic weakness, for the emotional pressure never discharges itself in useful action. The reader soon comes to see that such a nature must inevitably succumb to the power of the commonplace. He is

riding for a fall. Nothing can save him but work, and he can not work because of his overpowering emotions. That is to say, the tragic ending lay in the very nature of the theme, which was precisely the 'sufferings' of a youth thus constituted.

Another point in which 'Werther' differs from everything that had gone before is the rapid movement of the story. Once fully obsessed by his doleful vision Goethe wrote it out with an eye single to the main issue. The Richardsonian novel is nothing if not discursive, its object being to set the reader a-thinking about moral questions and so to improve his character. So too the 'New Eloise,' particularly the latter half, teems with long disquisitions about this and that. At times one completely forgets St. Preux and Julie; one seems to have passed out of the sphere of art and to be listening to an academic lecture on gardening, or suicide, or the simple life, or whatever the subject may be. In time one comes to feel that Rousseau's real concern is to express his opinions about various matters rather than to tell a story.

Of course this discursiveness was not Rousseau's invention. It had been a salient feature of prose fiction for centuries. Even in the days of medieval romance the author had shown his talent by embroidering a web of episodes around his main theme and incidentally delivering himself of his own up-to-date views. The character of the comment, like that of the episodes, had changed from age to age, but never ceased to be a part of the program. The views set forth might be those of a scholastic pedant, a gentle cynic, a solemn moralist. Sterne introduced the new pose of the sentimental humorist, for whom the story was nothing at all, the

episodes mere random happenings, and the sentimental comment the real heart of the matter.

The author of 'Werther' turned his back on all this traditional craftsmanship of the story-teller, keeping his own personality quite in the background. A very short preface introduces him as the editor of certain letters that have come into his possession, and an occasional footnote keeps alive this fiction. Toward the end there is a bit of narrative in the third person. Otherwise the reader's attention is kept riveted to the story of Werther. There are no irrelevancies such as a sophisticated reader would have been inclined to pass over. Indeed there is a steady assumption that the reader is not sophisticated at all,—not a person engaged in perusing a cunningly contrived fiction and concerned to understand the author's cunning—but a naïve tender soul reading the real letters of an erring brother, and capable of sympathy with suffering however much he might privately disapprove the sufferer's conduct. Trivial episodes that seem at first irrelevant afterwards turn out to have their bearing on the story. The opinions expressed are those of Werther, and the very vehemence with which they are set down hightens the impression of his general maladaptation to his surroundings.

But all these qualities that we have been considering —the fervor of the style, the hectic poetry of passion, the swift movement of the story, and its freedom from all retarding elements—would never have made 'Werther' a classic had it not come from the deep heart of its epoch. I do not refer to its tragic ending, which was a matter of artistic compulsion. The real thought of Goethe on that subject is contained in his oft-quoted

words, 'Be a man and do not follow his example.' It came from the heart of its epoch in the sense that it eloquently expressed what thousands felt in the form of a dumb discontent with existing arrangements and a vague aspiration for better things not yet clearly glimpsed. Fundamentally Werther's feelings are nearly always wholesome; the morbidity comes only from his dwelling on them too intently; in other words, from his failure to see life whole. Take for example his nature-worship. The feeling for nature as a mystic source of consolation, an unfailing refuge from the badness of society,—this feeling which had long been gathering momentum in literature—finds culminant expression in 'Werther.' But this is only one phase of 'all the wonderful feeling' with which Werther's heart 'embraces nature.' Most often it is her immanent divinity—the pantheistic reaction—that excites his transports, as when he would fain fly away with the wings of a crane 'to the shore of the boundless sea, there for just one moment, in the limited power of his breast, to drink one drop of the blessedness of the Being that in himself and by himself brings forth all things.'

Perhaps this is a rather crude expression of that expansive cosmic emotion which the modern man has learned to know in presence of the All. It has been better phrased by many a modern poet and by Goethe himself in verse. But in prose it was first essayed in 'Werther,' which for multitudes took on the character of a revelation. And then Werther's predilection for the simple life and the plain people, his fondness for children, his hatred of pretense and snobbery—no wonder so many saw in the book the gospel of a better

dispensation. If it opened the sluice-gates of a maudlin sentimentalism it also disclosed pure springs of wholesome feeling. It was like the discovery of a new continent for the human soul. This is much to be said of any book.

III

After the appearance of 'Werther' more than two decades elapsed before Goethe published anything more in the line of prose fiction. During the greater part of this interval, however, he worked in a desultory way at the story of Wilhelm Meister, which is as leisurely and diffuse as 'Werther' is rapid and centripetal. In both drama and fiction he had achieved a brilliant youthful success by a bold departure from the accepted conventions of the art, giving to the world a diffuse play and a concentrated novel. And then, with waning radicalism and increasing respect for traditional forms, came a number of concentrated plays and a highly diffuse novel. This does not mean that 'Wilhelm Meister' is like any novel that had gone before, any more than that 'Iphigenie' is like any play that had gone before. But in point of architecture 'Wilhelm Meister' is more like, say, 'Tom Jones' or Wieland's 'Agathon' than it is like 'Werther'; just as 'Iphigenie' is more like a play of Corneille than it is like 'Götz von Berlichingen.'

It is probable that 'Wilhelm Meister' was at first conceived as a sort of antidote to 'Werther,' which many were prone to regard as a pernicious defense of suicide. What would have happened if Werther had had something to do? What if, for example, instead of mooning and nursing his sick heart he had attended to

his sketching and in time become a painter of distinction? The germ-idea of the new tale was, accordingly, the saving power of an art felt as a 'mission' that would make life worth living. That Goethe should have hit on the histrionic art to be his new hero's medicine seems a little strange at first, for play-acting had never been more than a momentary concern of his up to the time of his settling in Weimar. Poetry and painting were more in his line. On the other hand, the theatrical business had certain marked advantages. In the first place, it provided in a natural way for the wandering hero, who had long been a prime ingredient of romance. Secondly, there was just then a keen public interest in the theater and all that pertained to it. Finally, the business of an actor-manager touches life at more points than does any of the sedentary arts.

It is to be remembered that prose fiction had not yet made friends, to any notable extent, with the stationary hero having a definite calling. Its aristocratic scheme had no place for a hero who needed to earn his living or was gravely concerned about the doing of useful work as a social unit. Its main tissue was a succession of wonderful and strangely complicated adventures in distant parts; its hero a man bent on winning his lady-love and marrying her after all the obstacles had been overcome. But the principal thing was the adventures, which might include dallyings with other women than the predestined wife. The scheme provided for any number of episodes and any amount of incidental comment by the author.

Now 'Wilhelm Meister' was to be a compromise between the technic of the older romance and that

realism which was a fundamental demand of Goethe's nature. Instead of the epistolary form which had served him so well in 'Werther' he chose that of narrative, which lent itself more readily to discursive comment. He made his Wilhelm a wanderer in the Germany of his own day but gave no definite indications of place. He undertook to depict German types of character but gave them un-German names. The atmosphere was to be, in general, realistic but the adventures and the improbable concatenation of events would savor of the older romance.

When he began to write he started in with simple autobiography under a very thin veil of fiction. The 'Theatrical Mission' opens thus: 'It was a few days before Christmas eve, 174–, that Benedict Meister, citizen and merchant of M., a midland imperial city, was walking home from his customary social gathering at about eight o'clock in the evening.' Then we are told how Benedict drops in on his mother and finds her furbishing up a collection of puppets for the delectation of her grandchildren at Christmas. Next we get a very circumstantial account of the Christmas puppet-play, of the deep impression produced by it on the boy Wilhelm, of his increasing fondness for play-acting, and of his infatuation (when he grows up) for the actress Mariane. It is all told in matter-of-fact narrative, in chronological order, with but little conversation.

In the revised version, the 'Apprenticeship,' the story begins thus: 'The play lasted very long. Old Barbara stepped often to the window to listen for the coach wheels.' Presently Mariane arrives and we learn from her talk with Barbara of her two lovers before Wilhelm

appears. The next morning he is chided by his mother for wasting so much time over the theater, whereupon he becomes reminiscent and recalls his childish play with the puppets. Then he goes and exhumes the old play-things, takes them for Mariane to see, and regales her at great length with further reminiscences. Meanwhile she falls asleep.

One can see that the reviser was trying to enliven his narrative by plunging into the midst of things, according to the Horatian maxim. The same purpose is evident all along in the frequent substitution of talk for narrative in the third person. But the talk is not genuine even in the revision; the characters do not converse, but discourse, often rather prosily. Wilhelm delivers his puppet-play recollections at length to his mother, who of course remembers it all as well as he.

Then he goes over the same subject with Mariane, who falls asleep in his arms. Naturally enough the reader is bored too. Very often Wilhelm seems to be lecturing, with little regard for his hearer's responsiveness. And how very wise he is! He seems to have reflected profoundly on every subject and to have his conclusions ready on tap. Such a clever youth, one feels, ought hardly to be an apprentice at all.

It is plain that when he began the tale Goethe was not obsessed, as he had been in the case of 'Werther,' by a vision that had to be recorded at white heat. On the contrary, he was now in a calm reminiscent mood. He felt the need of a framework for his reflections and recollections, and he saw that the biography of a wandering poet-actor would provide it. Its interest would lie in a saunter along the highways and byways of life,

in the wayside experiences and observations, rather than in any particular goal to be reached. Of course there was to be a goal. Our romancer did not dream, when he began, that his enterprise would go on spinning itself out year after year and never come to an end. There must have floated before his mind some point at which he was going to cut the thread and call the skein complete. And the goal can hardly have been the ordinary one of romance, a promising marriage. There was little in Goethe's temperament or experience to make him think of the mating process as a grand climax in any man's life.

Most probably the goal was to have been that which is hinted at in the first book of the 'Theatrical Mission' as follows: 'His calling was now clear to him; the object of his efforts seemed nearer to him in his endeavor to win Mariane's hand. In happy moments he could not fail to glimpse in himself the perfect actor of the future, the creator of a great national theater for which he had heard so many sighing.' At the end of the 'Theatrical Mission' this goal is virtually attained. Wilhelm has risen to be stage-manager of a good theater, he has acted Hamlet with success, prosperity is coming his way. As a mere antidote to 'Werther' the story might have ended there.

But by the time he reached that point in the story Goethe was beginning to lose interest in the 'mission' idea. His own mission in life was not yet clear to him and his activities at Weimar had brought him anything but unalloyed satisfaction. Moreover, it probably seemed to him that to let his aspiring hero end in the prime of his youth as a prosperous and contented the-

atrical man would be tame to the point of banality. So he decided to change the name of the tale and to steer for a different port. Wilhelm is made to fall out of humor with the theater and become convinced that he never had any talent for it. For a while he drifts and cultivates his ego. But when he is in danger of becoming an aimless hedonist he is taken in hand by a society of wise men who have been watching him and is made to see that he must have something to do. Culture will come only with work. Farming appeals to him. He buys an estate, wins the hand of an ideal wife, and we expect to see him anchored as a first-class husbandman. But before he is married to the adorable Natalie he has to go to Italy to settle an estate. He sets out with his son Felix—and right there the 'Apprenticeship' comes to an end.

The type of fiction represented by 'Wilhelm Meister' is no longer held in esteem; indeed the book never was popular except among the literary class. Today we object to its discursiveness, its slow movement, its obtrusive didacticism; above all to its passive, uninteresting hero who never comes to the point of doing anything to justify the pains bestowed on his education. Even before the end of the 'Apprenticeship' one begins to suspect that he will never amount to anything notwithstanding his amiable traits and his eagerness to learn; this suspicion then becomes a certainty in the 'Wanderings,' where all illusion of reality vanishes and the scheme becomes a mere receptacle for literary odds and ends. Indeed the three volumes of the 'Wanderings' should not be thought of as fictional art at all, being quite incapable of giving the kind of pleasure that good

art affords. But they have their value as a repository of the aging Goethe's reflections on religion, science, art, culture, industry, social ethics, and other matters that loom large on the horizon of the modern man. The ideas are precious, but we do not like to receive our philosophy as the by-product of a fiction which in itself is tedious and unreal.

IV

Artistically the 'Elective Affinities,' albeit here too the discursive method of the later Goethe is much in evidence, is more akin to 'Werther' than to 'Wilhelm Meister.' Like 'Werther' it is a tale of morbid despair ending in a voluntary death. Like 'Werther' it is harmonious in tone and tinged, toward the end, with the somber hue of tragic fatality. Finally, the story is climactic; it comes to an end, and the end, while it affronts the reason, just as in the case of 'Werther,' is felt to be inevitable. The mountain stream widens out as it reaches the plain, flows along pleasantly for a while, and then gathers itself together for the inevitable plunge over the precipice.

On the other hand, the style and method of the 'Elective Affinities' are more like those of 'Wilhelm Meister.' Here again the same unimpassioned diction—always warm but never hot—and the same sauntering pace with frequent halts and deviations. And not only is the reader often halted, but he must listen to much discourse and join in the contemplation of many a wayside phenomenon when he would much rather be on his way. Withal there is the author's serene air of detachment: others may sit in judgment, *he* is describing a case.

If we look at the matter from a technical point of view there can be little doubt that the discursive method is more disturbing in the 'Elective Affinities' than in 'Wilhelm Meister.' In the latter it is warranted to a degree by the very scheme of the book—a peripatetic hero seeking to gain wisdom by social contact. In following his fortunes one may expect to move rather slowly, that one may become acquainted with the people, the scenes, and the experiences to which he reacts. Nothing that intersects his orbit can be safely set down as irrelevant, even if one does not see at the time what it is for. But it is different in the 'Elective Affinities,' where we have a family tragedy wrought by the invasion of lawless passion. Essentially it is the story of a girl's renunciation. In its very nature the theme is circumscribed, like that of 'Werther.' Ottilie's tragedy grows out of her character, and of course her character, like everyone else's, is partly molded by her environment. But environment is a very elastic concept. In a sense one's environment is the infinite universe as shaped by all past time. This being so, it becomes necessary to select such details as are evidently, or can be made to appear, pertinent to the case in hand. This Goethe does not always do in the 'Elective Affinities.' There is a good deal in the story which has no discoverable bearing on the tragedy.

The intrusion of this alien stuff was partly due to the physical exigencies of publication, that is, of volume-making,—a matter about which Goethe became less and less squeamish with advancing years, until his lax conscience fairly ran riot in 'Wilhelm Meister's Wanderings.' Originally he had planned a comparatively short

story of renunciation, to be published as one of a collection. But the manuscript grew under his hands until it was too long for the purpose in view, so he decided to expand it into a fair-sized novel. Hence a mass of embroidery dealing with matters which happened to interest him personally at the time, but were not relevant to his tragic tale of renunciation. With careful scrutiny this embroidery can be detected by the reader.

Just as it is wrong to regard 'Werther' as a contribution to the ethics of suicide, so it is wrong to regard the 'Elective Affinities' as a contribution to the ethics of marriage; wrong, that is, so far as one may try to extract a doctrine from the story. It neither assails nor defends any particular view of the sanctity of wedlock. The characters set forth their views and act in accordance with their several natures. Sometimes the opinions set forth are strict, sometimes latitudinarian, but the author does not take sides. He has the air of stating a case, not of trying to influence opinion or practice. Here as elsewhere, in harmony with his principle that the function of art is not to teach directly but to exhibit that about which instruction were desirable, his attitude is one of artistic aloofness.

And yet, in a certain deeper sense he does take sides: for who can imagine him as letting the story end in such a way that Edward should obtain a divorce from his wife and marry Ottilie, the Captain marry Charlotte, and all four live happily ever afterward? In the philistine world of prosaic fact such an ending is quite thinkable; for in the more or less haphazard mating process of men and women it is only to be expected that there should be occasional misfits that might be corrected, to

the advantage of all concerned, by remating. For some people such remating might be plainly 'indicated,' as the doctors say. It is not of necessity unethical, does not of necessity turn out badly. A case can be made out for it.

Now if Goethe had really wished to advocate a cause or to justify the affinity doctrine, if he had been a special pleader instead of an artist, he would have given his novel that very turn at the end. Then it would have been clearly a 'novel of tendency' and there could be no mistake about it. Everybody would have taken it, and quite justly, as a plea for trial marriage and easy divorce. But he did not do this. Why? Because it is artistically impossible. It lies in the nature of Ottilie that she can not live on either alone or as the wife of Edward. Another woman might, but she can not. For *her,* just as for Werther, death is the only release from an intolerable situation. Were it otherwise she would not be Ottilie.

V

As a writer of short stories Goethe can hardly be reckoned among the great virtuosos. He has been surpassed by many a man of far less renown. What he wrote shows in respect of form the unmistakable Goethean touch, and to say this is to bestow praise. But his stories lack human interest. They are made of literary moonshine without any red blood.

It is to be remembered that he did not turn his hand to the short story, at least he published nothing, until he was nearly fifty years old, with a great reputation made on other lines. It was toward the end of the year 1795

that he began to publish his 'Diversions of German Exiles' in Schiller's *Horen,* and we have evidence enough that the enterprise was not taken very seriously. Five years before he had closed his account, so to speak, with his poetic past; meanwhile he had been waiting for an inspiration and indulging his lighter cynical vein rather freely. It was the time of the 'Roman Elegies,' 'Reynard the Fox,' and the weak satirical plays 'Grand Cophta' and 'Citizen General.' And now the grave idealist Schiller had come into his life with an urgent demand for fresh artistic production, and at the same time it was a question of popularizing a magazine that was in danger of sinking from excess of heavy matter. Withal it was a part of the *Horen* program to try to divert the public from the excitements and animosities born of the Revolution by offering them something better to talk about.

Under these circumstances Goethe bethought him of the old scheme of Boccaccio's 'Decameron' and other similar collections, in which a group of people amuse themselves by telling stories in order to keep their minds from an unpleasant subject. In this case the unpleasant subject would be the French Revolution. For such a purpose, where a game of cards would do as well, it was not necessary that the stories told should be notable works of art. And they are not. In fact, the old clergyman who functions as chief narrator declares in advance that what he has to offer will be quite worthless in itself. Of the seven tales in the collection three appear to have been original with Goethe; the others were revamped from his reading. The latter are dubious tales of lawless love, one of which fairly rivals Boccaccio

in frank indecency. It would have been quite impossible in the refined company which the introductory fiction describes. At the end of the collection stands the wonderful *Märchen,* engaging the fancy and baffling the intellect—a deliberate mystification quite alien to the spirit of real literary art. It has the effect, not of a true fairy-tale, which is always simple, but of a highly intricate charade to which no answer is forthcoming.

The most of the stories told in the 'Diversions' have an element of the marvelous which is left unexplained. There is something to debate and wag heads over. This quality Goethe seems to have regarded as the essential character of the *Novelle.* The stories incorporated in 'Wilhelm Meister's Wanderings' generally conform to the scheme. But it were hardly worth while to illustrate in detail.

In his old age—it was in the winter of 1826-7—he wrote a story for which at first he and Eckermann could find no satisfactory name. Finally he said: 'Why not call it simply *Novelle,* for what is the *Novelle* but a wonderful event that has happened?' The story appears under that title in his works. We read of an amiable lady who goes riding one day in the highlands near her husband's estate and is badly frightened by a tame tiger that has escaped from a menagery in a neighboring town. The princess flees in alarm on her horse, which falls exhausted just as the tiger is killed by a lucky pistol-shot of her trusty escort Honorio. As they are talking about the dead beast its keeper appears with his wife and their little son, who sings and plays the flute wonderfully. In a torrent of grief the woman explains that the tiger was quite harmless, its savage nature having been completely

subdued by the child's music. They offer to prove this upon the lion, which has also escaped and is not far away. Soon they locate the lion in a grotto and agree to try the effect of the boy's music. Amid the trepidations of the company the child advances boldly into the grotto, singing a song of a prophet in his cave who is guarded by angels and charms a lion and a lioness by means of his pious chants. Soon the singing child emerges from the grotto with the gentle lion, 'looking in his transfiguration like a mighty conqueror,' while the beast follows as a creature 'not bereft of its strength but tamed by subjection to its own peaceful will.'

The 'wonder' in this case is, presumably, whether the pious import of the child's song had anything to do with its effect on the lion. That question opens a vista of possible debate. The story leaves the intellect toying with an unsolved problem.

CHAPTER XV

THE CRITIC

In considering Goethe as a critic of letters and the plastic arts—such is to be the limitation of this study—we shall have to derive our total impression mainly from scattered utterances in his minor writings. During the first forty-five years of his life he wrote but little criticism aside from the anonymous reviews in the Frankfort *Gelehrte Anzeigen* in the year 1772. Almost contemporary with these we have a critical rhapsody on Shakspere and another on the Strassburg cathedral. In 1776 he published a paper of half-a-dozen pages entitled 'After Falconet and Beyond Falconet,' in which he commended the school of nature to painter and sculptor. His letters occasionally contain critical observations. There is criticism implied in 'Gods, Heroes, and Wieland,' which is a gibe at Wieland for his bedevilment of the Greek gods and heroes. There is some criticism in 'Werther' and 'Tasso,' a good deal in 'Wilhelm Meister.' His contributions to the *Horen,* beginning in 1795, were mostly of the creative order, while his *Propyläen,* devoted to art-criticism and largely taken up with matters of antiquarian scholarship, was short-lived. In his later years we have in the reviews and comments of *Kunst und Alterthum* and in his conversations with Eckermann a fairly complete reflex of his critical way of thinking.

I

The critic, like everybody else, is a child of his epoch. Today we think of criticism as an art, the art of intelligent appraisal. It has its affinities with science and with artisanship, and it is always—more or less—self-portraiture. But what makes its real worth is evermore its artistic quality—the *how* much more than the *what*.

Now in the Germany of Goethe's early years not much had been heard or seen of criticism as an art. It was rather a matter of argumentation over supposedly fundamental principles, over the relative merit of schools and models, over questions of scholarship. There was no clean-cut distinction between the scholar and the man of letters. The literary magazines were for the 'learned,' and criticism was largely in the hands of jejune theorizers who laid down the law with vigor and rigor. Even Lessing, the greatest critic of the epoch, was always at his best as an attorney for the prosecution. To Goethe, born with the instinct of the artist, these brain-spun theories of those who had never felt and never practiced were an abomination. And so we find that his earliest critical attitude is one of intense hostility to all theorizing. In a review of Sulzer's book on the fine arts he wrote for the *Gelehrte Anzeigen:*

> He who has had no sensuous experience of the fine arts had better let them alone. Why should he concern himself with them? Because it is the fashion? Let him consider that all theorizing blocks his way to true enjoyment, for a more pernicious thing than that has not been invented.

And further on in the same review:

> The only concern of the artist is that he shall feel his life's happiness to be nowhere but in his art; that, absorbed in his

instrument, he live there with all his feelings and powers. As for the gaping public, whether it can or can not account to itself for the thing, when it has done gaping, of what importance is that?

In a letter of 1773 we read:

The plastic arts now have me almost entirely. What I read and do I do for their sake, and I am constantly learning how much more valuable it always is to put hand to the veriest trifle and school oneself than to give the most perfect critical account of someone else's virtuosity.

Writing to Jacobi in the summer of 1774 he expressed himself thus:

You see, my dear fellow, what is after all the beginning and the end of all writing, the reproduction of the world about me by means of the inner world, which seizes all things, connects them, recreates them, kneads them, and gives them forth again in a form and manner of my own. God be praised, that remains an eternal mystery which I do not care to reveal to the gapers and babblers.

To complete the picture I add a few more citations from the *Gelehrte Anzeigen.* The first is from a review of Schummel's 'Sentimental Journeys,' one of the many German imitations of Sterne:

All his characters are unreal. He has never loved and never hated, the good Herr Preceptor. When he wants to make one of his creatures act for us he just puts his hand in his pocket and juggles out something from his bag.

This is from a review of Blum's lyric poems:

Why are the poems of the old skalds, Celts, Greeks, and even of the Orientals, so strong, so fiery, so great? Because nature impelled them to sing, like the bird in the air. As for us—we can not conceal it—we are impelled by an adventitious feeling that we owe to our admiration of the ancients and to the pleasure we have in them; it is for that reason that our best songs,

with a few exceptions, are mere imitations. . . . The best poet degenerates if he thinks of the public and is more filled with the desire of fame, especially journalistic fame, than with his subject.

In a review of Sulzer he quotes these words from his author: 'Especially has the tender mother [nature] deposited the full charm of her winsomeness in those objects which are most necessary to our happiness, notably in the blessed union whereby man finds a mate.' Then he comments savagely as follows:

What we see in nature is power, devouring power, nothing stationary, everything transitory; a thousand germs destroyed, a thousand born, every moment; great and full of meaning, infinitely manifold, beautiful and ugly, good and evil—all existing side by side with equal rights. And art is the exact opposite: it springs from the individual's effort to maintain himself against the destructive power of the All.

In these citations we may glimpse the simple creed that informs Goethe and gives him his criteria for judging the work of others. It is that the artist as such must have no creed; that is, no creed derivable from the intellect or accountable to it. Rules, conventions, theories, principles, inhibitions of any sort not born of his own immediate feeling, are no concern of his. They proceed from an inferior part of human nature, being the work of gapers and babblers. The meanest creation that is the genuine product of feeling, mood, and temperament is better than the best of theories. As an intellectual being the artist may perhaps deign to consider them in a sterile frame of mind, but when doing his work he must forget them and surrender himself entirely to his senses, his mood, his vision. It is for him

to *do*, and by his doing to compel the gapers and babblers to revise their rules.

In the light of calm reflection this creed of the youthful Goethe appears as good doctrine rather intemperately stated and badly grounded. A perfectly reasonable theory of the artistic process may include the doctrine that fundamentally the process is not an affair of the reason. But there is nothing to be gained by disparaging the reasoning process as such, even if we must recognize its limitations. It can not be proved that a record of a man's feelings, even in their chance vagaries, is more precious than a record of his thoughts, even in their most strenuous effort. And then there is no such thing as untrammeled freedom. In the esthetic sphere a break for freedom never means anything more than the throwing off of some particular fetter that has become irksome in order to put on another. This was in due time borne in upon Goethe, as we shall presently see. Meanwhile, to bring out still more clearly the lights and shadows of his early position, I will cite a passage from 'Wilhelm Meister.' It was written, seemingly about 1780, in the second book of the 'Theatrical Mission' and afterwards incorporated with little change in the 'Apprenticeship':

> What is it that troubles men except that their ideas can not make connection with things, that enjoyment steals away from under their hands, that the thing desired often comes too late, and that all attainment fails to produce in their hearts the effect which desire had led them to anticipate? To all this fate has made the Poet superior, as were he a god. He sees the aimlessly moving hurly-burly of passions, families, kingdoms, the unsolvable riddles of misunderstanding, where often only a single monosyllable were needed for the solution—he sees these things cause unspeakable and irremediable confusions. He feels the sadness and the joy of every human fate. While

the man of the world crawls along his course in consuming melancholy over some great loss, or meets his lot with extravagant joy, the sensitive, volatile soul of the Poet moves lightly, like the wandering sun, from night to day, and with gentle transition he tunes his harp to joy and sorrow. Native in the depths of his heart, the fair flower of Wisdom grows forth; and while others suffer in all their being as in a waking dream, he lives the dream of life as one awake. The rarest occurrence is to him at the same time past and future. And so the Poet is at once teacher, prophet, friend of the gods, and of men.

II

For tracing the evolution of Goethe's critical way of thinking during his first decade in Weimar, the data of positive fact are scanty and unimportant. His letters allude but rarely to his reading and reflection in the esthetic domain, and the eight volumes of his collected works published by Göschen in 1788-90 contain no critical writing. The mental readjustment that had been taking place is revealed only in his poems and plays. We can glimpse it as an accomplished fact in 'Tasso,' where the poet is no longer thought of as a sensitive plate—to use a metaphor that Goethe would not have understood—no longer as a mere recorder of what he finds and feels, but as a person whose ear is attuned to the harmony of it all. This is a very different conception, since it implies that there *is* under the manifoldness of phenomena a harmony which the ordinary dull ear hears only as a jangle of discordant notes. The poet's business is—in this later view of him—to detect the harmony, and, of course, to make it audible to others. But this is philosophy, theory,—the very thing that had been so disdainfully placed under the ban a few years before.

The new doctrine is, to dwell on it a moment, that the artist, more especially the poet, is not a copyist but an interpreter. He hears what others do not hear, sees what they do not see; while to much that they do see and hear he is insensitive. In other words, he selects and recombines in his own way, for his own purpose, the purpose being to produce an effect of harmony. In his study of rocks, plants, and animals Goethe had come to feel that mere accurate description of the sensible facts was not in itself science, but at best only the raw material of science. The really important thing was to know what nature had been driving at in fashioning things thus and so; that is, to spell out their *meaning*. And by a parity of reasoning he concluded that mere copying of nature was not in itself art. Art could never be a mere chunk of nature. It was necessary to select from her infinite store such facts as suited one's purpose and combine them in such a way as to put meaning into the copy.

Thus the door to the chambers of gray theory—that door which he had once closed with an impatient slam—was gently reopened, and he entered in—to find himself in a rather interesting place. During the whole period of his friendship with Schiller we find him speculating a great deal about art in general and about various arts in particular. At first it seemed to him a strange business, quite out of harmony with his nature, but he soon took to it kindly. Unlike Schiller he never imagined that speculation about the nature of art could be of use to the artist in the act of creation. To the end of his days artistic creation continued to be for him a matter of following one's instinct; but he thought that clear and correct ideas about the nature of art might be of

considerable use in the appreciation of it. Hence his growing eagerness to disseminate his ideas; and hence, after the *Horen* had gone under, his starting of the *Propyläen* to serve as an organ for them.

A few quotations from the introduction to the *Propyläen* will indicate the point of view at which he had arrived by 1798:

> The principal demand made upon the artist is that he cleave to nature, study her, imitate her, and bring forth something similar to her phenomena. How great, how prodigious, this demand is—this often escapes attention, and the true artist himself learns it only with increasing culture. Nature is separated from art by a huge chasm which genius itself can not cross without external aids.
>
> This doctrine [of polarity, or manifoldness in unity], we shall make it our business to explain for the artist; and we can the better hope to offer something that he will welcome, since we shall be concerned only to interpret and refer to fundamental principles that which he has hitherto done from instinct.
>
> When an artist takes hold of an object in nature that object no longer belongs to nature; one may say that by abstracting that in it which is significant, characteristic, interesting, the artist at that very moment creates it, or rather gives to it a higher value it did not have before.
>
> The genuine law-giving artist strives for art-truth; the lawless one who follows blind impulse, for the actuality of nature. By the former art is brought to its highest perfection, by the latter to its lowest estate.

The order of ideas here set forth leads naturally enough to the conception of typical art. It is held that the essential thing in the artistic process is an act of selection. From all aspects or qualities of an object the artist chooses those which he will portray and ignores the rest. But on what principle is he to make the selection? Goethe's answer is that he must select what is significant, characteristic, interesting. But when we

reach this point we reach a parting of the ways. For if we ask the question, What is it that makes an object interesting or significant, various answers are possible. One may answer that it all depends on the temperament of the observer. Setting out on that path we arrive finally at pure impressionism, and art becomes a bit of life as seen by a temperament. Another might say that what makes an object significant or interesting is what is peculiar to it, what differentiates it from all other objects. In this direction lies the possibility of caricature.

Goethe's theory was that what makes an object significant—he was very fond of the word *bedeutend*—is that which pertains to the type of which it is an example; the pure type, divested of all that is individual, accidental, or eccentric. He would have said, probably, that Cyrano de Bergerac's large nose was a personal peculiarity with which an artist could have no concern. Here again the influence of his scientific speculations is discernible. He had taught himself to believe that nature works in terms of type, and that to understand her visible forms is to perceive the idea, the architectural plan, according to which her types are built. Translated into the terms of art this meant that beauty was to be attained only by studious attention to the typical.

It is very doubtful whether such theorizing about nature and art was ever of practical use to anyone. Whatever formula may emerge from the ratiocinative process; whatever be the nature of the bed-rock one thinks to have found at the bottom of logic's muddy waters, a real artist, whether with brush or chisel or pen, will always prefer to build on his own foundations and take the chances. In such taking of chances lies all the

hope and all the promise of progress in art. So far as Goethe himself is concerned, I am unable to see that his theory helped him as an appreciator. As a theorist he was engaged in the very human, very fascinating, business of trying to justify his feelings and his taste to his intellect. That is what we all do all the time. Such attempts never have any other than a short-lived regulative value: the fashion changes and they are as the snows of yesteryear. It may be confidently affirmed that the work done by Goethe during the time when he was most under the influence of the ideas just set forth was not his best, either in the creative or the critical domain.

III

During the years of his connection with Schiller the critical manner of Goethe was often sharply censorious. He seems to have believed for a while that the public taste could be improved by cudgeling. One of his early contributions to the *Horen* was a short paper entitled 'Literary Sansculottism.' It is a savage attack on a writer in the Berlin *Archiv der Zeit* who had expressed his regret that the Germans were so poor in prose classics. Goethe's article is mere objurgation and does not illuminate the subject at all. Many of the 'Xenia' are merely captious, going out of their way to take a shot at men who hardly deserved the attention. One reads the epigrams today with a feeling of wonder that such anger could have found lodgment in celestial minds.

A mildly contentious spirit, tempered by the respect long felt for a great man, is revealed in the comments on Diderot's 'Essays on Painting,' which were posthumously published in 1794, some thirty years after they

had been written. Goethe read the essays with interest and found that two of them dealt with subjects that were just then very much in his own thoughts, namely, the relation of nature to art, and the significance of color. He was meditating a general introduction to the plastic arts, but on reading Diderot's essays gave up the larger plan and decided to translate the two just named and to supply a running comment of his own. The papers appeared in the *Propyläen* for 1799. As an enemy of mannerism and conventionality Diderot had demanded an unconditional following of nature—all very much in the spirit of the youthful Goethe. But nay, says the Goethe of 1799. 'Wonderful, excellent Diderot, why did you wish to use your great influence to confound [nature and art] instead of discriminating?' The true doctrine is then put thus:

> Nature organizes a living, indifferent being, art a dead but significant being; nature something real, the artist something apparent. To the work of nature the artist must add (what was not there before) significance, feeling, thought, effect on the mind; in the work of art he must find all that already there. A perfect imitation of nature is in no sense possible; the artist is called only to represent the surface of what appears. The outside of the vessel, the living whole, that which speaks to all our faculties of mind and sense, that which stirs our desire, uplifts our minds, and makes us happy by its possession, that which is vigorous, vivid, perfected, beautiful—this is the artist's appointed sphere.

In his life of Diderot John Morley quotes this passage and adds the comment that 'Goethe, as usual, must be pronounced to have the last word of reason and wisdom, the word which comprehends most of the truth of the matter.' Speaking for myself as a humble layman, I can not see that there *is* any 'truth of the matter'; any,

that is, which is statable in absolute terms. The history of any art, of art-epochs, and of taste, seems to show that there is an eternal oscillation between the crude actuality of nature, on the one hand, and the selective, purposive, interpretative effort of the human mind, on the other. When at any time production veers far toward either side an inevitable reaction sends it over toward the other. And so the ark floats and will continue to float on the river of time. But there is no point or strip between the two shores where we can say: Here and not elsewhere is the region of true art. All the dogmas on that subject are but ten-pins set up by one generation to be bowled over by the next.

In the summer of 1799 Goethe and Schiller exchanged ideas on the subject of dilettantism—a word they had just invented. A letter of June 22 discloses Goethe as planning a rather elaborate work on the subject, but only the analytic outline was actually written and this was not published until 1833. The temper in which the work was conceived appears from a passage of the letter to Schiller as follows:

> When we open our sluices some day there is going to be the most awful fracas. For we will send a veritable flood over the whole pleasant vale wherein botchwork has so comfortably settled. And since the chief mark of the botcher is incorrigibility, and since the men of our day are afflicted with a simply bestial self-conceit, they will yell when they see their grounds ruined. . . . But that is not to be helped; judgment must pass over them. We will let our ponds grow deep and then suddenly pierce the dams. There will be a mighty flood.

After the *Propyläen* had gone the way of the *Horen*, perishing for lack of support, one can notice a gradual abatement of Goethe's polemic ardor over questions of

esthetic theory. While the spirit of the crusader still continued to haunt him when he thought of Sir Isaac Newton, his criticism in the domain of imaginative literature now took on more and more the form of calm characterization. He may have felt that his polemic zeal and his erudite studies of Greek and Italian artists whose works were not at hand for inspection, and in whom very few persons took any interest—he may have felt that all this was estranging him from the living concerns of mankind and perhaps playing into the hands of those very dilettanti of whom he had such a poor opinion. At any rate his attitude toward the public, including the gapers, babblers, and botchers, now became gradually more tolerant, more conciliatory. Something of the spirit of live-and-let-live came over him.

In the year 1804 he began to write reviews for the Jena *Litteraturzeitung* and continued to do so until 1807. These reviews, numbering in all about a score, are in the main rather spiritless—by no means as keen and vigorous as those written thirty years before. At first they seem to be just ordinary hack-work, but on looking more closely one sees that this is not so. One becomes aware of a studious effort to see the book just as it is from the author's point of view, to get its exact savor, and to describe it rather than to pass judgment. The reviewer seems to be looking at his book much as a naturalist might look at a new plant or animal, concerned chiefly to understand its nature and affinities. Blame is rarely bestowed, and then only for lack of character, which is the one unpardonable sin. Whoever has a character, be it ever so rude, humble, uncouth, or plebeian, gets his due meed of recognition and praise.

Thus we find commendatory notices of one Grubel's poems in the Bavarian dialect and of Hebel's Alemannic poems, both as exhibiting the character of the plain people. The first volume of Arnim and Brentano's 'Wunderhorn' is very graciously reviewed. 'Such poems,' we read, 'are as true poetry as can be found anywhere. Even for us who stand on a higher plane of culture they have an incredible charm, such as the sight and the recollection of youth have for old age.' The conscientious reviewer actually takes the trouble to characterize each one of more than two hundred songs by a descriptive phrase such as 'tenderly Christian, winsome'; 'deep, mysterious, dramatically excellent'; 'vagabondish, whimsical, merry'; 'in the *danse macabre* style, like a woodcut, praiseworthy.' An unusually long review of the poems of Voss is devoted to analyzing his poetic character as exhibited in his works and modified by his surroundings and opportunities. But the new attitude of infinite tolerance is best seen in one of the unfavorable reviews, that of Klein's 'Athenor,' an epic in sixteen cantos. Says the reviewer:

> Take fragments of Wieland's poetic writings and put them together in a witch's saucepan; stew them over a slow fire until the personal flavor, the wit, the charm, and the gayety have all gone up in smoke; then stir the remaining viscous mass with a spoon, and finally let the product get quite cool and stiff—and you will have approximately an 'Athenor.' But as the case is of such a nature that we can not know whether our feeling for the work may not be an idiosyncrasy, we could wish that one of our critical colleagues would either confirm or refute our opinion by a more detailed investigation. As the shortest and most advisable procedure, however, let everyone who has started a little library illustrative of German character and art make a place in it for this 'Athenor'; for it is

no small pleasure, on opening a book, to encounter such an esthetic tragelaph.

This language seems to imply, beneath the jocosity, a haunting doubt as to the working value of the principle that something called character is what makes a poet's worth. What is character? It is a little remarkable that Goethe made no attempt to define it exactly. What it meant or might mean for him appears in his review of the poems of one Hiller, a self-made man of the people who had caught the trick of riming. The reviewer regards the case as one of highly developed talent without character. Hiller is actually likened to Socrates. We hear of his technical aptitude, practical sense, deep moral feeling, and self-reliance. But all this only makes him the worse as a poet. The review continues:

If, in the presence of a great king, he thinks himself a little king; if he looks unabashed for a quarter of an hour at a time into the beautiful eyes of an amiable queen, he is not to be chidden for that, rather accounted fortunate. But a true poet would have felt quite differently in the presence of majesty; he would have felt the incomparable worth, the unattainable dignity, the prodigious power which set the personality of a monarch over against the common man. One glance into such eyes would have sufficed him; so much would have been stirred up within him that his whole life would have poured itself out in a worthy hymn of praise.

So we see that it pertains to the 'character' of a true poet to get very much excited in the presence of royalty and to lose one's head in adulatory verse.

IV

For more than a decade after his short campaign of reviewing for the Jena *Litteraturzeitung* Goethe pub-

lished no more literary criticism except that which is contained in his autobiography. The seventh book of 'Poetry and Truth' opens with a long retrospect on the state of German literature at the time of his entering the University of Leipsic. There are comments on Günther, Liscov, Rabener, Gottsched and his Swiss opponents, Wieland, Lessing, and others. All this is written, however, to show how vacuous the literature was, in the main, and how little of help and guidance it was capable of affording. There is no appraisal of any writer in his entirety and for his own sake. The author of 'Poetry and Truth' is occupied with himself; other writers come in only so far as they affected him. His literary comments are thus in the nature of casual observations. We may pass them by without further attention and come to the final stage of Panoramic Benevolence.

The earlier numbers of *Kunst und Alterthum,* which record the personal experience of Goethe as a tourist in the Rhine country, contain nothing to the present purpose except the evidence of his kindlier feeling for the Catholic church and for Christian art. It is not until about 1820 that the magazine begins to contain reviews of books. They are most numerous in 1823, 1826, 1827, and 1828. The notices pertain to many different species of literature, for example: biography, drama (ancient Greek, German, English, French, Italian, Spanish), fiction, folksongs (German, Serbian, Romaic, Lithuanian), foreign journals (English, French, Italian), history, language, legend, philosophy, poetry (of many nations), religion, travels. Speaking broadly, the pervading spirit of all these book-notices, comments, and

excerpts from the journals is contemplative rather than critical. The writer has reached an eminence from which he looks out with a serene and roving eye on the world's literary production, grateful to anyone who will give him a bit of solid information, a new idea, an esthetic pleasure, or a true picture of what is going on in the world. He is frankly pleased with the homage paid him as the monarch of European letters but reacts to it without vanity. He dislikes to say unpleasant things about other writers, yet is not perturbed when they are said about himself. Thus when Varnhagen von Ense brought out a book on Goethe as seen by well-wishing contemporaries he proposed a companion volume on Goethe as seen by ill-wishing contemporaries. He said in his supreme detachment:

> I am moved to this proposal by the consideration that, since literature in general and German literature in particular is not going to get rid of me at once, or hereafter, as it seems, it can not help being agreeable to every lover of history to learn how things looked in our time and what spirits were dominant. Such a compilation would be highly interesting to me myself in looking back over my life; for I can not deny that many have detested me and hated me and represented me to the public accordingly.

Such boundless charity, brooding over a great flood of ephemeral publications, could hardly be expected to beget much memorable criticism. Nor did it. The great mass of these latest book-notices is nothing but sand and gravel; yet anyone who will pan it carefully may find here and there a grain of gold in the shape of some far-reaching thought that arrests the attention and lingers in the memory. Thus on receiving a new manual of

esthetics and finding in it the usual division of poetry into lyric, epic, dramatic, and didactic, he wrote his friend Zelter that he could make nothing of the book. With the letter he enclosed a notice, afterwards printed in *Kunst und Alterthum,* in which occurs this sentence: 'All poetry should be instructive, but unnoticeably; it should call our attention to that about which instruction were desirable. We ourselves must extract the teaching from the book, just as from life.'

As to the lesson to be derived from his own works he expressed himself frankly in a short paper entitled 'Another Word for Young Poets':

> If I were to state what I have been to the Germans in general and to young poets in particular, I think I may call myself their liberator: for in me they have become aware that, just as man's life proceeds from within, so the artist must work from within; seeing that, whatever he does, he will bring to light nothing but his own individuality. . . . Let the young poet utter only that which lives and works on with continuing effect. Let him strictly put aside all spirit of opposition, all malevolence and evil-speaking, all mere negation; for of that nothing comes.

Advice to young poets is also the burden of many a talk with Eckermann, albeit no one knew better than Goethe that such advice must always be a sheer waste of breath. At one time he assures Eckermann, who had poetic aspirations of his own, that the great rule is to be oneself and cleave to nature in the concrete; more often he warns against his own mistakes, plays the schoolmaster, and would fain bring the young man to his own way of thinking. This is one of the inconsistencies brought to light in Eckermann's curious, often mystifying, ever-fascinating volumes.

It would be quite futile to winnow the 'Conversations' in the hope of finding anything like a critical creed or even a consistent attitude with regard to criticism. What we find is rather the negation of all creeds; an ever-changing attitude which varies with mood and the barometric pressure.

What a singularly perverse comment, for example, is that of February 7, 1827, upon Lessing:

> Pity the extraordinary man that he had to live in such a miserable epoch that offered him no better subjects than those which are treated in his plays. Pity him that in his 'Minna von Barnhelm' he had to take an interest in the squabbles of the Saxons and Prussians, because he found nothing better. Also the fact that he was continually polemizing and had to polemize was due to the badness of his epoch. In 'Emilia Galotti' he had his pique at the princes, and in 'Nathan' at the priests.

This from a man who had himself said that real import first came into German literature with the Seven Years' War; who had himself treated the squabbles of a robber knight with the empire and of the Netherlanders with the Spaniards; who had himself 'polemized' a great deal about this and that and was still on occasion venting his spleen on the Newtonians and the Vulcanists!

Or take this of February 1, 1827, from a man who for a good part of his life had been preaching the importance of seeing the thing just as it is, and had shown precious little compunction about upsetting conventional ideas:

> So now they are trying to undermine the Pentateuch, and if destructive criticism is anywhere injurious it is in the things of religion; for there everything depends on faith, to which one can not return when one has lost it.

But let us spy no more upon the nodding Homer. Multiplied indefinitely such citations could only prove that Goethe as critic, even in his old age, stood on no surer ground than the rest of us. As far as the east is from the west was he from having reduced criticism to an exact science. He continued to be, as he had been, an impressionist, a man of moods, hobbies, prejudices, limitations. It is mere myth which imputes to him an unprecedented poise of judgment or a supernormal insight into literary values. Occasionally he saw the books of his own day as they are now seen by posterity in the light of fuller knowledge and a longer perspective; more often he did not. He harped much to Eckermann on the worthlessness of contemporary production in Germany, but never talked to him about the posthumous plays of Kleist, or the new works of Grillparzer or Heine. He had a very human bias in favor of authors, however insignificant, who had burned incense on his own altar.

In reading Eckermann it is always to be remembered that we have to do with casual talks which may not have been taken down exactly or may have overstated the idea expressed. Eckermann was so very docile and reverential that there must have been a terrible temptation to stuff him. The 'Conversations' have the charm that always pertains to the casual talk of a great man; but they were not intended for posterity and should be used with some caution as an evidence of deliberate opinion. Perhaps the real attitude of the octogenarian with regard to letters is best mirrored in a talk recorded by Eckermann under date of January 31, 1827:

I see ever more clearly that poetry is a common good of mankind, and that it appears everywhere, at all times, in hundreds

and hundreds of men. One makes it a little better than another and swims a little longer on top; that is all. So Herr Matthison must not think that he is the man, and I must not think that I am the man; but each one must say to himself that the poetic gift is no great rarity, and that no one has any special reason to plume himself on the making of a good poem. To be sure, unless we Germans look abroad from the little circle of our environment we are likely to fall into pedantic self-conceit. So I like to look about among foreign nations and I advise everyone else to do likewise. National literature does not mean much now; the era of world-literature is at hand and everyone must do his part to hasten it along. But even in our estimation of that which is foreign we must not cleave to anything in particular and regard it as a model. We must not think in that way of the Chinese, or of Serbian, or Calderon, or the Nibelungs; but when we need something as a model we must always go back to the ancient Greeks, in whose works Beautiful Man is represented. Everything else we must only regard historically, getting as much good out of it as we can.

CHAPTER XVI

FAUST

It is fitting that a book about Goethe should end with a survey of 'Faust,' since there the man is so to speak summed up. The theme attended him from his twentieth year to his eighty-first, and the completed poem is a stratified deposit of his best thinking as set aglow by the imagination. Something similar might be said of 'Wilhelm Meister,' but that is far less interesting than 'Faust' because the final phase of it is so lacking in coherence and finish.

I

Looked at in the large 'Faust' is Goethe's confession of faith in the goodness of life. I mean the worthwhileness of man's life on earth, considered as its own end, its own reward. That is what the long poem with all its endless variety of incident and experience finally comes to. Having lived a hundred years Faust is still unsated with life. He would fain dream and plan and work a little longer. He dies in a rapt altruistic vision of the future, seeing in his mind's eye a free people dwelling on a free soil that he has won from the sea. He is happy that his name will live for eons. He feels that it is good to have lived.

True, he is afterwards 'saved' in the theological sense. His entelechy brings up in heaven among the

spirits of holy men and penitent women; and it is a sort of Christian heaven, for the details were furnished by the hagiography of the medieval church. Yet Faust has never made the slightest pretense of being a Christian. He has neither believed nor worshiped nor acquired merit by good works. He has always refused to think of heaven at all. Nor is his salvation presented as in any sense a reward of the deeds done in the body. We hear from the saving angels that he owes his fortune to his always having 'striven.' But he has only striven as all men strive and must strive if they are to live at all. All that he has done is simply to persist in his own being. He has never been 'converted.' He has just kept moving as impelled by his feelings, desires, and convictions. Can any man do less without becoming as a stone or a plant? 'I have just rushed through the world,' he says in his old age—

> I caught each lure of pleasure by the hair,
> And if it slipped away I let it fare:
> I have just wished, and done, and wished again,
> And so stormed thro' my life with might and main.

There is plainly, from any Christian point of view, no saving grace in that kind of living.

So the heaven at which Faust arrives is the heaven that we are all destined for. In other words, it is nothing more than a symbol of Goethe's universalism—his belief in the Eternal Goodness. The blessed state is not a reward of peculiar merit but a stage of progress. This can only mean that Faust's earthly life was good in the sight of the Eternal, albeit some of it was bad in the sight of men. Thus we come back to where we started: the message of 'Faust' is an affirmation of the goodness

of life. The celestial mountain at the end of the poem was invented to round out a dramatic scheme that had long haunted Goethe's imagination, but it does not grow out of his philosophy. Perhaps that is the main reason why his heaven is so unalluring in spite of his great effort to invest and suffuse it with a holy religious atmosphere. At the last Faust is supposed to be purged of all his mortal dross, that is, of everything that made him a man. He is also deprived of the company of the comrade who had made his earthly life interesting. Will he not, when the novelty has worn off, find the new state of being a trifle inane? What will there be for such an entelechy as his to do or to enjoy during the endless lapse of eternity?

How came this idea of life's intrinsic value and sufficiency, the idea that the purpose of life is to live, and that living is its own end and reward, to bulk so large in Goethe's thinking? For after all it is nothing more than the universal will to live translated into the terms of the philosophizing mind. It is the tacit assumption on which all living and all thinking rest. Like a kitten or a colt, or an eagle buffeting the wind, the normal human being has no need of ghosts come from the grave to tell him why he is alive. Without the vital urge the human race would have come to an end ages ago, and with it all philosophy, science, art, and religion. We are simply obliged to postulate the goodness of life, since it is the condition of all other goods that we can possibly imagine. Ultimately it is the measure of all goods and gives us our main criterion by which to judge of their worth. Think of elysium as we may, we can not think of it as a sequel of non-existence.

Sophocles makes a chorus say that 'not to be born is, past all prizing, best; but when a man hath seen the light, this is next best by far, that with all speed he should go thither, whence he hath come.' This is the language of morbid depression over the ills of life. We have no means of proving such a thesis, and it goes against the deep instinct of humankind. When Mephistopheles, surveying the dead body of Faust and recalling all the restless striving which has now come to an end, observes that *he* would prefer the Eternal Void, he speaks the language of diabolical cynicism. At best it is the Devil's preference, not man's. Many there be who, could they foresee the course of their life before being shot into it, would decline the gift. But we do not foresee and are given no choice. Without being consulted about it we are thrust into life and commanded to live. The individual may grow weary and throw away the boon, but if he does so he may at least be sure that not many will follow his example; and that if all were to follow it, the total effect would be to restore our planet to the conditions which existed before the advent of *homo sapiens*. Would that be better? Even the most ferocious pessimism usually shrinks from such a dismal conclusion as that. So then it must be better to play the game. This is the doctrine of 'Faust.'

II

The germ of the poem is despair of the intellectual life. At the time of his early musings on the theme Goethe himself had felt that despair acutely. He had tasted of academic learning in the fields of law, philosophy, logic, ancient literature, chemistry, medicine, and had

found it all very unrefreshing. It offered no nourishment for the soul. He had also gone into the occult, had read divers old books of magic, alchemy, and demonology, and had given himself a laboratory course in a half-serious search for the philosopher's stone. The upshot of it all was a feeling amounting to conviction that the learning of the day was a dreary futility. There was no certainty anywhere, no rock-bottom of indubitable truth—nothing but opinion, guesses, empty verbiage, and the witless chewing of tradition's cud. There was no joy and no real light to be got from study.

But religion had come home to him as a personal matter. He had learned to pray and had known the ecstatic tears and fervid exaltations of the mystic. Here, in the feeling of personal communion with God, was that which at least gave joy for the time being, and at best seemed to point the way to a higher, surer, more inspiring knowledge than was to be had from the reading of many books.

Is it strange that Goethe's artist-nature, given as it was to the intense visualization of his own experience in some alien mask, should have been strongly drawn to the puppet-play hero? To be sure, the legendary Faust is anything but an aspiring soul. His riot of pleasure is distinctly of the earth, earthy. But might he not, like many another man, have been better than his posthumous reputation? There were certain traits of his character, notably his mental curiosity, his thirst for travel and adventure, his love of antique beauty as embodied in Helena, that really favored such a view of him. At any rate they were not the traits of a swinish man. Might he not have been a misunderstood and hence maligned

searcher after real, worth-while knowledge? Or might he not have been a superman actuated by a passion for making the most of life while it lasted?

But there was his magic. The legend regarded that as utterly bad, but made him only a practitioner of the vulgar black art. The things that he does are silly. But Goethe had read of natural magic, *magia naturalis,* which was a very different thing. Natural magic is conceived by its late-medieval votaries as the noblest of arts, the queen of the sciences, the perfect flowering of religion. Clearly then Faust's dabbling in magic, tho the legend looked on it with horror, did not of necessity stamp him as a bad man on the way to hell.

So young Goethe planned a Faust-drama to run along the lines of the puppet-play in respect of action and incident, but on a much higher plane of thought and imagination. It was not to be an ordinary stage-play with division into acts and observance of the unities; but rather a life-history presented in a succession of dramatic pictures. In 1774 and 1775 he wrote down a portion of what had come into his mind—that which has been known to the world since 1887 as the Göchhausen 'Faust.' These scenes are the main source of all that we definitely know about the earliest phase of Goethe's masterpiece.

The Göchhausen 'Faust' introduces the far-famed magician as a youngish university teacher—he has been in the business about ten years—who has traversed the learning of the four faculties and found it all vanity and vexation of spirit. He is no wiser than he was before. Nothing can be known. Withal he is poor, obscure, and oppressed by the feeling that his bookish life is contrary

to nature. He turns to natural magic in the hope that some powerful spirit may show him what 'holds the world together at its core' and enable him to 'behold all energy and the seeds of things.' We get a hint that his desire is humanly unrealizable, but Faust aspires to be more than a man. He dreams of putting off the trammels of the flesh, of becoming part of nature's life-blood, of mystic illumination, and of divine activity. His conjuring works. Amid terrifying portents the Earth-spirit appears to him in flame—an awesome symbol of terrestrial energy. At first Faust is terrified. Then he plucks up courage and affirms his 'nearness' to the dread apparition. The reply is: 'Thou art like the spirit whom thou comprehendest, not like me.' The Spirit vanishes suddenly and Faust is left in utter despair. But at that moment his famulus enters and there ensues a midnight conversation about oratory and the study of history.

Then there is a break in the continuity. In the next scene Mephistopheles has somehow come into the action —presumably sent by the Earth-spirit as a being of lower order whom Faust *can* comprehend—and has become Faust's familiar. We hear him, dressed in Faust's academic gown, coach a freshman with respect to the four faculties. Then, of a sudden, Faust has turned rake. With the aid of his familiar he makes the acquaintance of a pretty girl, gets her with child, and then goes away to amuse himself while she is arrested and held in prison. When he learns what has happened he fiercely lays the blame on Mephistopheles and demands to be taken forthwith to the imprisoned Gretchen, that he may rescue her from the clutches of the law. In the prison he is a

remorseful but impotent witness to her half-insane ravings and her death.

Here the so-called 'Ur-Faust' ends. The greater part of it is taken up with the twenty scenes of the love-tragedy, which in a very important sense is episodical. Both in form and substance it is quite alien to the genius of the legend. There is very little of the supernatural in it and that little is unimportant. But for his name there is nothing to suggest that Mephistopheles is anything more than an ordinary human rake's friend and abettor. His is simply the devilishness which prompts a man to follow the pull of sexual passion reckless of consequences. Faust needs no urging; it is he that does the urging.

The whole episode of Gretchen grew out of Goethe's deep interest in the girl-mother who kills her child in order to escape social ostracism. It is his arraignment—and a terrible arraignment it is—of the laws, the *mores,* and the state of public opinion which made such tragedies only too common. But as part of a play based on the story of the magician Faust Goethe's pathetic and realistic love-tragedy is an alien element.

What then of the Faust-drama as a whole, one inevitably asks. How would it have ended if its author had finished it in the days of his youth? Of course *some* ending must have floated before his mind, however vaguely, and it can not have been salvation in a Christian heaven. That was possible for the Goethe of 1831, but not for the Goethe of 1775. At that earlier date a Faust ending among the saints would have seemed to him no Faust at all; for the very heart of the old story, well known to every one, was the magician's colossal wickedness, his pact with the Devil. Still more certain is it

that Goethe can never have intended to follow the legend and damn his hero. He had put too much of himself into the character for that.

But if Faust was thought of neither as a bad man on the way to perdition nor yet as a potentially good man who would blunder into heaven in the fulness of time, what other possibility remains? The answer seems to be that the Faust of Goethe's early musings had nothing whatever to do with the Christian scheme of rewards and punishments, of heaven and hell. His Faust was a superman, quite reckless of conventional good and evil and dowered with an overmastering desire to live himself out as fully as possible. To break out of his human prison-house and lord it over time and space; to know and do and enjoy; to succeed and to fail; to suffer and grow strong, to run the whole gamut of man's possibilities—such was his dream. Mephistopheles was to be the purveyor of this experience—not a malignant, soul-seeking fiend, not especially a tempter to vice, but an embodiment of the will to live; an incarnation of that devil that resides in every man, luring him on hither and thither, to try this and that, for joy or for pain. This devil, of course an expert in magic, was to be the abettor of Faust's wild ambition in all the matters of time and sense, but totally unable to comprehend or satisfy his higher spiritual aspirations. The superiority of Faust to his servitor is steadily presumed and often asserted in the early scenes. The reader feels perfectly sure that the higher nature is not going to be subjugated by the lower.

But how was it all to end in the theater? For a positive answer to this question the data are insufficient. It is an open field for speculation. For myself I imagine

that if Goethe had gone on, in the days of his youth, to write that part of the play which was to follow the death of Gretchen, he would first have taken Faust to some royal court, in accordance with the puppet-play scheme, and would there have put him through various more or less interesting experiences. At last Faust would have found something to do, something to engage his altruistic social feeling, and would have died reconciled to life and glad of having lived. Perhaps—this is the merest guess-work—just before the curtain went down the Earth-spirit would have shown himself again and have said to the man about to die something like this: 'I have now permitted thee, with the aid of my envoy, to exhaust the possibilities of the life on earth, so far as a *man* may know them: pass on to another state of being, where a new life, now unimaginable, awaits thee.'

But there would have been no stage heaven, no anticipation, *on the boards,* of the divine verdict. Yet the action would have been so managed that an average spectator would have left the theater feeling that *such* a Faust was probably safe in the hands of his Creator.

III

The literary renown of 'Faust' is apt to blind us, by the glamor of its many excellences, to the inherent absurdity of the fable. We are required, as it were, to believe in magic; that is, to accept imaginatively an order of things which we well know to be altogether chimerical. It is an order of spirits, devils, demons, witches, conjuring, hocus-pocus, transformations of men into animals and of animals into men; of tricks, illusions, magic mantles, and magic wands; of horses that fly in the air, of

treasures got from nowhere, marriage with insubstantial ghosts, hallucinatory fantoms, and all that. In short, the atmosphere of the poem is the atmosphere of folk-lore, of the fairy-tale; in other words, of ancient superstition disporting itself in unrealities that were never beautiful or elevating, but rather ugly and debasing. Taken in the aggregate this network of superstition once formed a terrible fetter for the human mind. That 'wonder-world of faerie,' which so captivated the Romanticists, was really, when we come close to it, very much the same wonder-world which savage tribes inhabit at the present time. This fact has been so firmly established by modern anthropology that there is no need of laboring the point here.

Thus the Age of Enlightenment, into which Goethe was born, had good reason to preen itself on having ceased to believe in the superstitions of spiritism. These were classed, rightly enough, among the childish things which it was well to have put away. In the middle of the eighteenth century, hardly less than today, intelligent folk regarded magic as a fraud, and mostly as a vulgar fraud. None but the very benighted still took it seriously. While it still figured in chap-books, crude shows, and puppet-plays for children, it was well understood to be nothing but make-believe. There was no place for it, seemingly, on the higher levels of literary art. We may be sure that if Goethe had derived his ideas of magic solely from the authentic Faust tradition he never would have undertaken to poetize it. It was too vulgar, too lacking in spirituality. But the notion of natural magic, tho this was in truth no less fantastic and chimerical than the vulgar black art, gave him at least a starting-

point for something at once serious and noble. For he was able to connect *that* with his own discontents, struggles, and aspirations.

But once bravely tapped, in the opening scene with the Earth-spirit, this source of inspiration soon ran dry. And really it is hard to see how anything could have been made of it in the sequel. The invention is too supernal, too recondite, too remote from the realities of human life in which, after all, Goethe was always mainly interested. So he soon saw that it would be necessary to lean more on authentic tradition, such as everyone understood or could easily be made to understand, and to achieve poetic dignity by means of symbolism. It was necessary to humanize Faust without sacrificing anything of his aspiring spirituality, and to humanize Mephistopheles by making him more of a cynical wag who should enjoy his role without taking himself too seriously as devil.

It is plain that some such thoughts as these must have been running in the mind of Goethe, when, in the year 1788, he resumed work on the strange drama that had come to a standstill some fifteen years before. He was in Italy now, and very much estranged from the whole inner world of his pre-Weimarian youth. As he read over his old manuscript, already grown yellow with age, he saw that he had imagined two very different Fausts and had left an unbridged chasm between them: first a dyspeptic dreamer of transcendental dreams, and then a rakish seducer tormented by his conscience. So he inserted the scene 'Witch's Kitchen' to bridge the chasm. An aphrodisiac drink, which is at the same time a renewer of youth, is brought in to account for Faust's sud-

den depravity. That misconduct which had originally been motivated solely by the pull of sexual passion, with no need of encouragement from any external devil, is now set over to the account of diabolical instigation.

Of course the witch's brew in Faust's veins does not really excuse him, does not spike the guns of the prosaic moralist; nor was it seriously meant to do so. From the start it was a part of the plan that Faust should sin and suffer egregiously, that being a part of the human experience that he coveted. His rejuvenation is only a stage device whereby a middle-aged artist, looking back somewhat cynically on the poetic plans of his youth, sought to remedy as best he could the difficulty that he had created for himself by inserting a realistic tragedy of man and maid in the midst of a dramatic action dominated everywhere else by magic and hocus-pocus. In some way the character of Faust had to be rescued and ennobled if he was not to forfeit sympathy and be held worthy of his legendary fate. And since his conduct toward Gretchen was humanly unpardonable there was no better expedient than to fall back on magic for the motivation of his rakish conduct.

The frame of mind in which the First Part was completed between 1797 and 1802, the work done at this time by way of filling in gaps, the partial elaboration of certain scenes that were to follow the death of Gretchen, the decision to reserve all that for a Second Part—all this is the subject of comment in the biographical portion of this volume. What is important to note, for one who is interested in the poem as a whole rather than in the making of it, is that the new plan was only an amplification of the original scheme—by no means a radical

alteration. The Prolog invites us, on the authority of God himself, to regard Faust as a 'confused' servant of the Lord; as a wanderer in the dark who is going to be led out into the clear in the fulness of time. The Lord is infinitely patient, infinitely tolerant and liberal. He has provided the Devil as a comrade of man to stir him up and keep him on the move. The Devil is to have free rein as long as Faust shall live on earth; after that —such is the clear implication—the Devil's services will not be needed. Mephistopheles accepts the offer on these terms. He makes a brave show of expecting to win and to come back and triumph over the Lord, but *we* know, of course, that he will be discomfited.

Such a devil is as far as possible from the malignant fiend of Christian mythology. It is no affair of his to trap immortal souls into eternal bondage. He is not even man's enemy, but rather his 'companion' on the path of life. It is he who supplies the motive power without which man would soon come to complete stagnation. He is not interested in dead men. His function in the divine government of the world is to incite men to action by holding before them the lure of pleasure, of satisfaction. In other words, to drop the language of symbolism, Mephistopheles is the embodiment of those instincts, passions, appetites, which clamor for gratification and urge men on in the illusory hope of finding, somewhere on earth, a *permanent* satisfaction.

At the time of writing the Prolog (1797) Goethe had definitely decided to make no further use of his invented mythology of the Earth-spirit, but to fall back on the familiar conceptions of the Christian tradition with respect to heaven and hell. Not only should his hero be

'saved' in the conventional sense, but his salvation should be shown on the stage as a part of the dramatic action. And so the momentous wager was formulated as we find it in lines 1692 ff. Faust bets his immortal soul on the proposition that Mephistopheles will not be able to satisfy him with any form of earthly pleasure to such degree that he, Faust, shall wish to delay the flight of time. If he shall ever say to the passing moment, 'Pray tarry, thou art so fair,' that is to be the end. Mephistopheles is to be 'free of his service.' And the implication is, of course, that Faust is then to serve the Devil forever on the 'other side.'

If we scrutinize this pact in the light of the Prolog it becomes clear that Mephistopheles has no chance whatever of any post-mortem triumph. He will get his reward as he goes along, like any artist, in the sheer pleasure of doing his work. In reality, as we know, he does not care for the souls of dead men, albeit he will make a show of doing so when the time comes, because he has a reputation to maintain. He is the Devil and must e'en play his part to the end. As for Faust, of course he will never be completely satisfied with the present moment, for that would imply a state without desires, hopes, plans, or aspirations. Such a result can not come as a consequence of pleasure. To wish to eternalize a momentary pleasure of any conceivable kind is childish. It would be to abrogate one's human nature and become as a swine wallowing in the mire. There is no danger that Faust will ever come to that point, for he has, and knows that he has, aspirations that look beyond time and sense. So he enters into the pact with perfect confidence and takes pains to make very clear that what he is after

is not pleasure, but experience as wide and deep as possible. Then the love-tragedy falls into its place as his experience of passionate error, grief, remorse, and self-contempt.

IV

When we come to the 'great world' of the Second Part we are back again in the genuine atmosphere of the legend, in the wonderland of the supernatural. We enter it over a bridge of transparent symbolism. Faust reappears in the role of wanderer—with weary body and tortured soul. He lies down at nightfall among the Alpine flowers. Good fairies of the night-time put him to sleep, watch over his slumber, and give him back to the daylight a new man in soul and body. The glorious Alpine sunrise quickens his aspiration to 'strive ever onward toward the highest existence.' Does anyone think he is let off too easily? One might say so quite justly if we were here on the plane of every-day ethics, law, and custom. But we are in fairyland. Faust is really not let off at all. He suffers like a man. His bath in the mountain-dew of Lethe concentrates symbolically into a single night the long remorse and the slow recovery which in the world of reality would take many years.

We come now to what Goethe called the 'summit' of the entire drama.

The exploits of the legendary Faust are mostly puerile tricks with no potential poetry in them. But there is one exception—his marriage to Helena. In this wonderful invention, implying that the bold bad doctor's amorous desire had not been able to content itself with anything

short of the best that ever was, alive or dead, superstitious fancy scored a hit. To be sure, sane old Homer has little to say of Helena's beauty—but later poets! What an ado over the 'face that launched a thousand ships!' Little wonder that Goethe, enamored from his youth of things Greek, soon saw that here was something that he could use; something that might be made the very corner-stone of his temple. But *how* to use it was a problem that teased him at intervals for half a century before it was finally solved in the 'Helena' of 1827, that is, the third act of the Second Part.

At first he thought of Helena as a ghostly paramour, not unlike her prototype in the legend, who should cohabit with Faust in a castle on the Rhine. But such a connection would hardly do for a man bent on 'striving toward the highest existence.' A nobler Faust called for a nobler Helena. And so, in the days of his ultra-classicism, he decided to present Helena as a revenant shade from Hades. Orpheus-like Faust should visit the lower world and procure from Queen Persephone the release of his Beloved for a temporary sojourn on earth. Helena should have the perfect semblance of her former self, but only a dim ghostly memory and hence no consciousness of guilt. Faust should appear as feudal lord of the Peloponnesus, inhabiting a Gothic castle in Arcadia, the fabled land of beauty where once a wonderful Golden Age had brightened the life of men. In this way Helena could be made to suggest, not only the perfection of woman's beauty, but also the whole far-off glory of Greece; and so to exert on Faust that sanative, uplifting, and energizing influence which contact with the Greek spirit had once exerted over the men of the Renaissance

and later over Goethe himself and his contemporaries of the eighteenth century.

And so it was that the Helena episode, after its long incubation, finally saw the light as a 'classico-romantic fantasmagory' and was published separately with that sub-title in 1827. No wonder that readers of that day, among them Thomas Carlyle, hardly knew what to make of it. Not till the very end did they get a clear hint that Phorkyas was Mephistopheles, and even then it was not quite clear why the northern Devil had chosen to put on that particular mask. And then the chronology! A German magician of the sixteenth century, husband to a Greek shade of the Homeric Age, and father to a son who suggested things altogether modern! At first it seems fantastic to the point of absurdity; but when one knows the legend and the long history of Goethe's musings everything falls into its place quite naturally, and the symbolism is as clear as crystal. And what splendid poetry, especially in the classic choruses and further on in the Euphorion scenes! Unearthly it no doubt is. Nothing could be more contemptuous of the realistic formula. And yet it is all so clearly seen, so perfectly thought out, so infinitely suggestive. The most strenuous foe of poetic symbolism has but to read it to be convinced of the error of his ways.

With the third act finished and in print it remained only to fill in before and after. This was the work which occupied the aged poet from 1827 to the summer of 1831. Mephistopheles was first sent ahead to the court of the rotten empire to prepare a place for his comrade by ingratiating himself as court fool and propounding a grand scheme of financial redemption. The

Masquerade provides the opportunity. Faust in the mask of Plutus does a wonderful bit of conjuring which delights his Majesty and causes him to install the two wonder-workers as official purveyors of amusement. The Emperor demands to see Helena and Paris, and Faust is sent after them—not, however, to Hades, but to the vasty Realm of Ideals presided over by the mysterious Mothers. He falls frantically in love with the fantom Helena that he has evoked, attempts to touch the form contrary to orders, and is paralyzed.

To restore him to his senses Mephistopheles takes him back to his long-deserted study, where Wagner, now a world-famous man of science, is trying to make a man synthetically. With the help of Mephisto's magic the great experiment succeeds, and the delectable Homunculus appears as a radiant incorporeal mannikin in a glass bottle. He straightway reads the sick man's mind, diagnoses his case, and prescribes that he be taken to the land of his dreams, to classic soil, to the Thessalian Walpurgis-Night. Arrived on the Pharsalian plain Faust at once comes to himself and sets out among the fantoms to find Helena. The Centaur Chiron, learning of his strange infatuation, judges him to be in need of medical aid and takes him to the priestess Manto, daughter of the divine physician Asklepias. With Manto Faust disappears en route for Hades. The intended scene before the throne of Queen Persephone was never written but left to the imagination.

Then we follow the fortunes of Mephistopheles. Pursuing his comparative investigations among the classical spooks in a cynical yet not indocile spirit, the northern Devil finally comes across the three supremely hideous

daughters of Phorkys, who live in the dark and have one eye and one tooth in common. Accosting the trio with gentlemanly veneration, Mephistopheles, seemingly just for a lark, begs the sisterhood to condense the essence of the trio into two and to lend him the form of the third. They consent and the thing is done. Thus we are prepared for the Devil's mask in the third act. He had to have a classical mask of some kind, and Goethe needed the Supreme Ugliness for a picturesque contrast to the Supreme Beauty.

Finally the fourth and fifth acts were written, a part of the fourth coming last to completion. At the end of the Arcadian fantasmagory Faust is caught up into the air in a cloud formed of the vanished Helena's dress and wafted northward 'far above all that is vulgar.' He lands on a mountain-peak, presumably in the Tirolese Alps, and his vehicle of cloud parts in twain. One part floats away eastward, taking for an instant the semblance of an antique heroine and suggesting to Faust the 'grand import of fleeting days.' The other rises high in air, recalling memories of youthful love. Mephistopheles arrives in seven-league boots. For a little while the pair debate the merits of vulcanism in geology, and then the question arises, What next?

On his aerial journey from Arcadia Faust has noticed and been irritated by the waste of energy involved in the ceaseless ebb and flow of the tides. He would fain fight the arrogant sea and make habitable land of the tide-swept shore. Mephistopheles notes that he 'comes from heroines' and agrees to further his ambition. We learn that the Emperor is now in grave trouble. A condition of anarchy following the paper-money debauch has led

to the demand for a strong ruler. A pretender to the throne has taken the field, and the two armies are about to meet in decisive battle. Faust and Mephistopheles take the side of the legitimists and quickly win the battle by magic. Faust receives as his reward the coveted stretch of tide-swept beach.

At the beginning of the fifth act the great engineering project has been carried out. Faust is boundlessly rich, yet there is a thorn in his flesh. Not far from his palace is a rise of ground which he covets, but an aged couple who live there refuse to part with their home. Exasperated by their obstinacy he sends his servitor to remove them to a better home that he has selected for them elsewhere. Mephistopheles executes the order with such brutality that the old people are killed and their cottage set on fire. As the conscience-smitten Faust is observing the ruin from his palace at midnight four shadowy forms drift toward him from the smoke of the burning cottage. One of them, Dame Care, slips through the rich man's keyhole and croons in his ear a dismal strain on the awful estate of the man who has become a victim of worry. Faust defies her magnificently, declaring that he has always led a life of action, content with the circle of the earth as known to him. He has never worried about the unknown future and refuses to worry now. Whereupon Dame Care breathes on his eyelids and makes him blind.

But the deepened darkness without does not dim the inner light of his will to live and to do. He still has a great plan to carry out. He must drain a pestilential swamp that is poisoning his domains. In the ecstasy of his planning for the future, seeing in his mind's eye a

free, industrious, social-minded people dwelling on a free soil that he has won from the sea, he thinks he *might* say to the passing moment, 'Pray tarry, thou art so fair.' Then he sinks back dying.

What follows—the battle of the good and evil spirits for the possession of the dead man's soul, the final triumph of the saving angels, the arrival of Faust's entelechy among the saints, his induction into the new life—all this need not concern us in detail. It grew out of the dramatic requirements of the theme. We know from the first how it will all turn out.

V

It has seemed worth while to follow the genesis of 'Faust' in some detail and to lay bare the thread on which all the parti-colored beads are strung because only in that way can the poem be understood in its essential import. If we try to take it as if it had fallen from the sky ready-made, considering only what it *is*, as we rightly do in the case of imaginative productions that have sprung from a single creative impulse, we shall find it simply incommensurable—to use a favorite word of Goethe—with the human intellect. Conceive the 'idea' as we may, there is much that will seem irrelevant. There are scenes in which a simple dramatic motive is covered up with a mass of embroidery which tends to obscure the main issue and create a sense of disproportion. This grows out of the fundamental character of the poem as presenting a life-history in dramatic pictures. Some of the pictures are snap-shots or impressionistic sketches, while others are elaborate genre-paintings. The scene 'Open Field' in the First Part is

limned in six lines, while the Classical Walpurgis-Night takes nearly fifteen hundred. And between the two are many gradations.

But the connecting thread, that is, the ethico-religious trend, is not in the least obscure. While we can not call 'Faust' an anti-Christian poem, in view of its ending, it certainly is opposed to the other-sidedness of the orthodox Christian faith. Goethe took sides frankly with the Pelagians. Believing that God is immanent in human nature, especially as love, he was averse to the idea that a man, by following his own nature, that is, his divinely implanted instincts, could forever alienate himself from his Maker. The creature might go wrong and suffer, but God was back of his world as the Eternal Pardoner. Goethe was one of those who held, to put it in Tennyson's familiar phrase, that

> somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill.

And then he was opposed, in general, to the old teleological way of thinking. Just as the lamb is not there to supply man with wool or the rose to delight his senses, so man's life on earth could not depend for its meaning or its warrant on anything outside itself. It might be the forerunner of an unknown and unimaginable state of being after death, but its end was to be sought in itself, not in anxious preparation for the unknowable. Out of this way of thinking grew the basic conception of Faust's character: his pride in fearing neither hell nor devil, his consuming thirst for experience, his sturdy indifference to issues beyond the veil, his passionate refusal to worry.

That Faust should 'storm' or 'reel' through life, incurious of heaven and unafraid of hell, was the dominant idea of the early plan. But when we come to the enlarged plan of a later time we find that a new idea has come in, namely, the idea that Faust should attain to 'clearness.' Such is the Lord's promise in the Prolog. Thus without any radical upsetting of the original scheme the center of gravity is shifted and we are promised a drama of mental clarification. In the course of his reeling through life under the dominance of passion and instinct Faust is to learn wisdom by virtue of his indwelling consciousness of the 'right way.' In other words, life itself is to clear up his confusion with regard to life and to show him how he can best—unconsciously, of course,—serve the Lord.

Taking, now, the point of view of the middle-aged Goethe, the apostle of clearness, let us look a little more closely into this matter of mental clearing up. What is the exact nature of the earlier Faust's 'confusion' and of his later clarified wisdom? Does the scheme promise anything more than that years will bring the philosophic mind, as they do—more or less—to all men? That much, certainly, it does promise. In a sense Faust's experience typifies that of men in general as they pass from youth to age. But there is more to it than that. It must be remembered that Goethe's hero is not 'man,' not a typical or average man, but a highly exceptional character. He is a would-be superman, afflicted, as a psychiatrist might say, with a disease of the imagination. A brief trial of the intellectual life, with insufficient air and exercise, has put him out of humor not only with

book-learning but with life in general. He feels that human life, with its dull plodding, its limitations and heart-aches, its painful ignorance of all that matters most, is not worth having. So he dreams of becoming a god, a spirit. It is this morbid despair of life of which he is to be cured.

The clearing up at the end of the Second Part has three different aspects. In the first place, Faust comes to see that the magic he invoked in his youth has not made matters better. In a way the dreams of the superman have been realized. Mephisto's magic, while of a lower order than that of which he had dreamed, has nevertheless enabled him to move swiftly over the earth, like the spirits of his imagination, to participate in many a scene of pleasant illusion, and to do all sorts of things that human beings can not do. On the other hand, his long connection with spirits and incantations has enmeshed him in a network of superstition so that he can no longer distinguish the true from the false. He is haunted by vague fears. The simplest occurrence fills him with alarm lest it portend some evil. It were better, he thinks, to 'stand before nature as a man alone.' This we know to have been precisely the effect of magic on our remote ancestors who believed in it and tried to regulate their lives by it. Magic and what pertains to it has never been the liberator but always the enslaver of the human psyche.

In the second place, the aged Faust comes to the conclusion that the circle of the known earth, that is, human life with all its drawbacks, is not the soul's prison but its opportunity. It affords sufficient scope for every power. The one thing needful is to act, to keep moving, to be

good for something. To one who is good for something the world will not be 'mute.'

> So let him travel his appointed day,
> And 'mid besetting ghosts just go his way;
> Let him stride on, while joy and pain betide,
> Each moment of his life unsatisfied.

Finally, and most important of all, Faust finds, after trying so many things, that his best satisfaction, the nearest approach yet to that happy moment which he might conceivably wish to delay in its flight, is the thought of having done a good stroke of work to make his part of the world a better place for better men to come. This thought may fairly be called the secular gospel of the modern man.

VI

But after all, it is not mainly the philosophy of 'Faust,' not the thread of thought on which the beads are strung, that counts most for lovers of the poem. It is rather the beads themselves, in their rich variety of form, substance, and color, that give the poem its perennial fascination. Certainly it is not all inspired. There are passages that one would like to put into an apocrypha; but they are not numerous and the shrewd reader soon learns where they are. What remains has an appeal that custom can not stale or repetition wither. Here and there are difficulties for the understanding, but the traveler in a poet's wonderland must expect his wayside trials. They go with the voyage—from the times of Homer and Aeschylus down to yesterday or the day before. 'Faust' is imaginative symbolic poetry. What

is best in it can not be adequately put in plain prose, or transferred from one language to another.

It is not worth while to say much here about the long eclipse of the Second Part. In an unlucky moment Goethe let fall a word to Eckermann anent the 'mysteries' that he was putting into the poem. For about half a century after that the mysteries were much exploited by prosy writers who tried to explain them as allegories, abstract doctrine, or veiled biography. In this way they made of the Second Part a kind of literary nightmare in which the lover of poetry could have no pleasure. And as the First Part, especially the love-tragedy, was enjoyed by everybody, it became almost an accepted dogma that the Second Part did not really count; that it was an old man's afterthought, having no vital connection with the First Part and exhibiting painful signs of senile decay.

And then began a reaction, which was greatly furthered in Germany by the frequent staging of the entire 'Faust' and perhaps also by the ever-increasing popularity of Richard Wagner, whose appeal was quite largely due to his poetic symbolism. And then came, in 1885, the opening of the Goethe house in Weimar and the discovery of paralipomena which made it perfectly clear that the Second Part, in its main substance and drift, was no afterthought at all but a vital part of the early plan. The division into two parts was nothing but a matter of literary convenience. As for the 'mysteries,' they are much like those which the aging Shakspere put into the 'Tempest.' The unity of the whole is only the unity of a poet's life. The charm of the Second Part resides in the mellow humor with which the wisdom of

age, still mildly aglow with the old flame, plays with the details of absurd old legend, lifting them from the vulgar earth, even as Faust is lifted by his vehicle of cloud, and making them mirror amid a thousand flashes of imaginative insight the 'grand import of fleeting days.'

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTES

The primary source of information for that part of Goethe's life described in the first three chapters of this volume is 'Poetry and Truth'; see above p. 143. Other autobiographic writings of moment for particular phases of his life will be mentioned in their place below. Of great importance, secondly, are his letters, which are now accessible in chronological order in the Weimar Edition of his works. This is the edition referred to in the ensuing notes unless some other is specified. Its four divisions are denoted in English as Works (61 vols. of imaginative writings); Scientific Writings (13 vols.); Diaries (16 vols.), and Letters (50 vols.). Conversations of Goethe are cited according to Biedermann, 'Goethes Gespräche,' 10 vols., 1889-1896. Much that came from Goethe's pen in his early years and is not found in any edition of his works has been very carefully edited by Max Morris in 'Der junge Goethe,' 6 vols., 1909-1912.

Of the countless books, brochures, and articles dealing with particular phases of Goethe's life, a few of the more notable will be mentioned below in the notes to the separate chapters. There is a good deal of biographic information to be found in the Goethe-Jahrbuch (1880-1913), also in the Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft (28 vols. 1885-1913). In all matters of bibliographic detail the scholar's great resource is Goedeke's Grundriss, vols. 4 (2) and 4 (3) of the 3rd edition, these being a greatly amplified revision of vol. 4 of the 2nd edition. Together they comprise 1,564 octavo pages of Goethe bibliography. From this it is patent that only a minute portion of the enormous literature about Goethe can be referred to in the ensuing brief notes. A useful compilation of his utterances with regard to his own works is provided in Gräf, 'Goethe über seine Dichtungen,' 9 vols., 1901-1914.

Biographies are numerous. I name in order of time a few that seem most notable, or that attracted the most attention when they came out, either for fulness of biographic detail, or for discriminating criticism, or for interesting illustrations: H. Viehoff, 1847-1854; G. H. Lewes, 1885; H. Grimm, 1877 (English translation by S. H. Adams, 1880); H. Düntzer, 1880 (English translation by Lyster, 1883); K. Heinemann, 1895; R. M. Meyer, 1895; A. Bielschowsky, 1896-1898 (English translation by Cooper, 1905-1908); G. Witkowski, 1899; E. Engel, 1909; L. Geiger, 1909; H. S. Chamberlain, 1912; G. Brandes (Danish), 1915.

Since Professor Thomas wrote, many new general studies have appeared. Among the most important may be mentioned the works of F. Gundolf (1916), B. Croce (Italian, 1919; German, 1920; English, 1924), O. Ludwig (1920), P. Hume Brown (1921). The book of Brandes has been translated into German (2nd ed., 1922) and English (1924).

CHAPTER I

There is much literature about Goethe's mother; see Goedeke, 4 (2), 673. Her letters have been well edited by A. Köster, 'Briefe der Frau Rat,' 1904. See also K. Heinemann, 'Goethes Mutter,' 1891. There are English books about her by A. S. Gibbs, 1880, and by M. Reeks, 1911. Regarding Cornelia Goethe, see G. Witkowski, 'Cornelia, die Schwester Goethes,' 1903.

Page 5. Frau Aja. The affectionate nickname is from an old tale, 'Die Heymons Kinder.' The first citation is from a letter of Nov. 14, 1785, to Charlotte von Stein; the second from a letter of May 16, 1807, to Christiane von Goethe.

P. 6. For the 'well-known verses' (Vom Vater hab' ich die Statur, etc.), see Works 3, 368.

P. 7. On Goethe's dislike of luxury see Conversations 8, 62, under date of March 25, 1831.

P. 8. Frankfort reminiscences in 'Faust.' See Thomas's edition of Part I, p. 273.

P. 9. Comte de Thoranc. On the uncertain spelling of the name see Goethe-Jahrbuch 5, 406; also M. Schubart's book 'Der Königs-lieutenant,' 1896, chap. 4.

P. 12. 'There I would sit,' etc. See Bettina von Arnim's 'Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde,' H. Grimm's edition, p. 358.

CHAPTER II

Goedeke 4 (2), 206 ff., lists considerably more than a hundred articles and brochures relating to Goethe's student life, not including the too copious Friederike literature, for which see Goedeke 4 (3), 91 ff. Suffice it to mention the very full treatment by Vogel and Traumann, 'Goethe als Student,' 1910.

P. 20. 'As if the Holy Ghost,' etc., and the other 'persiflage'; 'Faust,' l. 1910 ff.

P. 22. 'The Briton.' Letters 1, 24.

P. 27. 'My present mode of life,' etc. Letters 1, 200.

CHAPTER III

For Goethe at Wetzlar see H. Gloël, 'Goethes Wetzlarer Zeit,' 1911; for the Werther craze, J. W. Appell, 'Werther und seine Zeit,' 4th ed., 1896. As all the contributions to the Frankfort *Gelehrte Anzeigen* were anonymous it is not easy to pick out Goethe's with perfect assurance; see M. Morris, 'Goethes und Herders Anteil an dem Jahrgang 1772 der Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen,' 1909.

P. 45. 'To him that loved thee,' etc. Works 4, 190. Text of the 'Wanderer,' Works 2, 170.

P. 47. 'If the author had known,' etc. Works 37, 252.

P. 48. Byron's 'mingling with the universe'; 'Childe Harold,' (canto 4, stanza 178).

P. 51. 'Form is form,' etc. See J. W. Braun, 'Goethe im Urtheile seiner Zeitgenossen,' 1, 6.

P. 53. 'Be a man,' etc. Works 4, 162.

CHAPTER IV

Much literature relating to Weimar in Goethe's time, to the ruling house, the court circle, their social relations, gossip, amusements, etc., is listed in Goedeke 4 (2), 706 ff. For the 'Briefe aus der Schweiz,' see Works 19, 197.

P. 65. The hint to Klopstock is found in Letters 3, 63.

P. 67. 'How I have learned,' etc. Letters 3, 191.

P. 68. 'I have been right close,' etc. Letters 3, 239; the 'strawsack in the little room,' Letters 4, 52.

P. 70. 'Could think just nothing,' etc. Letters 5, 337.

P. 72. The remark concerning Spinoza, Works 28, 288; the quotation from Spinoza, 'Ethics,' part 5, prop. 19.

P. 78. The slighting remark about 'Elpenor,' Letters 13, 194.

CHAPTER V

While not published till long afterwards, Goethe's 'Italian Journey,' 'Campaign in France,' and 'Siege of Mainz,' all relate to the period treated in this chapter. On Goethe in Italy see especially J. R. Haarhaus, 'Auf Goethes Spuren in Italien,' 1896-1897; also C. von Klenze, 'The Interpretation of Italy,' 1907, and the same author's 'From Goethe to Hauptmann. Studies in a Changing Culture' (Chapter 1), 1926.

lies in my nature,' etc. Works 30, 70.

P. 84. 'Had I not taken the resolution,' etc. Diaries 1, 200; the expressions of disgust ('always a suffering hero,' etc.), Diaries 1, 307.

P. 85. 'Every day some new,' etc. Works 30, 212.

P. 86. 'Albeit I am still the same,' etc. Letters 8, 72.

P. 88. 'I should prefer to throw it into the fire,' etc. Works 31, 54.

P. 95. 'Such a dear,' etc. 'Briefe der Frau Rat,' 2, 151 (Apr. 7, 1807).

P. 97. 'The painful emotion,' etc. Works 32, 429.

P. 99. 'Happy on classical soil,' etc. Works 1, 239

P. 100. 'Erstwhile I had a love,' etc. Works 1, 309.

P. 101. 'If you will continue,' etc. Letters 9, 224.

CHAPTER VI

Goethe-Schiller literature, seeing that their relations form an important chapter in the lives of both, is naturally very abundant; see Goedeke 4 (2), 689 ff. There are German editions of their correspondence by F. Muncker, 1893, and H. S. Chamberlain, 1905, and an English translation by Schmitz, 1877-1879. The original Xenia manuscript was published in full in 1893 as vol. 8 of the Schriften der Goethe Gesellschaft. Other volumes of the same series deal with 'Das Weimarer Hoftheater unter Goethes Leitung,' and with 'Goethe und die Romantik.' On this last subject see also Haym, 'Die Romantische Schule,' 4th ed., by Walzel, 1920.

P. 104. 'But that,' said Schiller, etc. Scientific Writings 11, 17.
P. 112. Fr. Schlegel on 'Romantic' poetry; *Athenæum*, 1 (2), 28.
P. 115. Pössneck. See C. J. Kullmer, 'Pössneck und Hermann und Dorothea,' Heidelberg, 1910.
P. 116. 'Faust' as its author's sorrow; l. 21.
P. 121. 'In limitation,' etc. Works 4, 129.
P. 122. 'When the healthy nature,' etc. Works 46, 22.

CHAPTER VII

P. 125. The quotations are from 'Epilog zu Schillers Glocke,' Works 16, 165.
P. 126. 'We live,' etc. Letters 19, 204; 'the little friend,' etc. Letters 19, 197.
P. 127. 'Scarcely had you gone,' etc. Letters 19, 213.
P. 128. For Goethe's account of his interviews with Napoleon see Works 36, 269.
P. 130. 'I will gladly confess,' etc. Letters 20, 225.
P. 133. 'Nature and Art,' etc. Works 4, 129; 'Lieb Kind,' etc. Works 2, 12.
P. 143. The citation from Luden: Conversations 3, 103.

CHAPTER VIII

For Suleika see 'Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Marianne von Willemer,' edited by Creizenach, 2nd ed., 1878.
P. 151. 'Even a wise man,' etc. 'Faust,' l. 1174.
P. 153. 'The Devil and his grandmother,' etc. Letters 20, 92.
P. 157. 'I noticed this evening,' etc. Conversations 6, 7.
P. 160. 'My life is to be a wandering,' etc. Works 24, 10.
P. 164. 'Mephistopheles, who,' etc. Works 15 (2), 173.
P. 167. 'Spacious world,' etc. Works 3, 71.

CHAPTER IX

Much has been written of Goethe's philosophy and evolutionism; see Goedeke 4 (2), 433 ff. I single out for mention here: E. Caro, La philosophie de Goethe, 1866; O. Harnach, 'Goethe in der Epoche seiner Vollendung,' 1887; R. Steiner, 'Goethes Weltanschauung,' 1897; H. Siebeck, 'Goethe als Denker,' 1902; R. Magnus, 'Goethe als Naturforscher,' 1906; E. A. Boucke, 'Goethes Weltanschauung auf historischer Grundlage,' 1907.
P. 175. The Faust-passages alluded to are ll. 1948 ff., 1781, and 1830 ff.
P. 177. 'When I had sought,' etc. Works 28, 288.
P. 178. Spinoza as a man and a brother. Letters 2, 156.
P. 179. 'What were a God,' etc. Works 3, 73.
P. 180. 'Since reason demands,' etc. Spinoza's 'Ethics,' part 4, prop. 18, scholium; passion as a 'confused idea,' *ibid.*, part 5, prop. 3; 'I noticed moreover,' etc. 'Improvement of the Intellect,' near the beginning.

P. 181. 'Whatsoever frees our minds,' etc. Works 42 (2), 174; 'What government is best,' etc. Works 42 (2), 159; the stanza from the 'Mysteries,' Works 16, 178.

P. 182. 'Giving up our existence,' etc. Works 42 (2), 150; 'we put one passion in place,' etc., Works 29, 10; 'Soul of the World,' etc., Works 3, 81.

P. 183. 'Since our excellent Kant,' etc. Letters 24, 227.

P. 184. 'One can not imagine,' etc. Works 33, 196.

P. 185. 'In the progressive changes,' etc. Scientific Writings 7, 12.

P. 187. 'But as matter never,' etc. Scientific Writings 2, 11. On the authorship of the essay 'Die Natur' see 'Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft,' 7, 393 ff.

P. 188. 'The more imperfect a creature,' etc. Scientific Writings 6, 10.

P. 190. The citations in order: Works 28, 209, and 2, 230, and Diaries 1, 112.

P. 191. 'In breathing, lo,' etc. Works 6, 11; 'our highest gift,' etc., Schriften der Goethe Gesellschaft, 21, no. 391 ff.

P. 192. 'To keep oneself afloat,' etc. Boucke, 'Goethes Weltanschauung,' p. 355. For the reference to 'Tasso' see l. 930. 'Legislators who promise,' etc. Goethe-Jahrbuch 22, 17.

P. 193. 'Was ihm gemäss ist.' Works 28, 27.

P. 194. The poem 'General Confession.' Works 1, 126.

P. 196. 'From everywhere streams,' etc. Works 3, 363.

CHAPTER X

P. 197. 'To Goethe belongs,' etc. Populäre wissenschaftliche Vorträge, erstes Heft,' 1876, p. 37. Haeckel is cited from 'Die Naturanschauung von Goethe, Darwin und Lamarack,' 1882, p. 32; Du Bois-Reymond from his address 'Goethe und kein Ende.' 1883.

P. 200. 'I am now living,' etc. Letters 4, 285.

P. 201. 'Sitting on a high and naked peak,' etc. Scientific Writings 9, 173.

P. 202. 'When Nature in herself,' etc. 'Faust,' ll. 10095 ff., Taylor's version; 'without haste and without rest,' Works 3, 247.

P. 203. 'Be the case as it may,' etc. Scientific Writings 9, 257.

P. 205. 'The time will come,' etc. Letters 6, 77.

P. 206. 'Geologic problems and their Solution.' Scientific Writings 9, 254.

P. 207. 'Cutting up and counting,' etc. Scientific Writings 6, 107; 'if I could only impart,' etc., Letters 7, 242.

P. 208. 'It is delightful,' etc. Works 30 (1), 89.

P. 210. 'This, then, we have no,' etc. Scientific Writings 8, 71.

P. 212. 'Man is most closely akin,' etc. Letters 6, 389; 'the ranks of living creatures,' etc., 'Faust,' ll. 3225 ff. 'Nature can compass,' etc., 'Riemers Briefe von und an Goethe,' p. 311.

P. 213. The two citations: Scientific Writings 6, 120, and 8, 18.

P. 214. 'The question to be asked,' etc. Scientific Writings 8, 17; the verses, 'Faust,' 672 ff.

CHAPTER XI

P. 219. 'Letter of Pastor——'. Works 37, 155.
P. 220. 'But we submit,' etc. Works 37, 249. 'We must say it,' etc., Works 37, 255.
P. 221. 'Thank you, dear brother,' etc. Letters 2, 156.
P. 222. 'When I feel,' etc. Works 19, 8; 'the most casual walk,' etc., Works 19, 76.
P. 223. The verses: 'Faust' ll. 3432 ff., Taylor's version.
P. 226. The three reverences. Works 24, 242.
P. 227. 'You have treated,' etc. Letters 9, 18.
P. 228 'So much I can,' etc. Letters 6, 14.
P. 229. 'I can know nothing,' etc. Conversations 3, 72.
P. 230. The citations in order: Conversations 8, 43; 8, 35; 5, 235.
P. 231. The citations: Conversations 4, 339, and 8, 147.
P. 232. 'The understanding does not reach,' etc. Conversations 7, 16.
P. 233. The citations: Conversations 8, 149, and 3, 308.
P. 234. The citations: Conversations 4, 294; 5, 74; 7, 49.

CHAPTER XII

P. 238. 'The clearest, largest,' etc. Matthew Arnold, 'A French Critic on Goethe.'
P. 240. The passage from the Prelude to 'Faust'; ll. 186-187.
P. 243. The songs referred to are: Mailied, Works 1, 72; Es schlug mein Herz, 1, 68; Kleine Blumen, kleine Blätter, 1, 74.
P. 244. The songs: Dir darf dies Blatt, Works 1, 75; An Belinden, 1, 71.
P. 245. The songs: Glück und Traum, Works 1, 45; Christel, 1, 18.
P. 246. König in Thule, Works 1, 171; Heidenröslein, 1, 16; Auf dem See, 1, 78; Jägers Abendlied, 1, 99; Der du von dem Himmel bist, and Über allen Gipfeln, 1, 98; Erlkönig, 1, 167; Der Fischer, 1, 169; Ilmenau, 2, 141; Hans Sachsens poetische Sendung, 16, 123.
P. 247. Füllest wieder Busch und Tal, Works 1, 100; Edel sei der Mensch, 2, 83; Des Menschen Seele, 2, 56; Kennst du das Land, 1, 161; Wer nie sein Brot, 2, 118.
P. 248. Rastlose Liebe, Works 1, 84; Wonne der Wehmut, 1, 97; Das Göttliche, 2, 83. The verses are from Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey.'
P. 249. 'Thou shalt deny thyself,' etc. 'Faust,' l. 1549.
P. 250. Byron on Rome: 'Childe Harold,' canto 4, stanza 78. 'Oh, how happy,' etc. Works 1, 242.
P. 251. 'The central peace,' etc. Wordsworth's 'Excursion,' book 4. 'When on the spindle,' etc. 'Faust,' ll. 142 ff., Taylor's version.
P. 252. 'His ear perceives,' etc. 'Tasso,' ll. 160 ff.
P. 253. 'For he was ours,' etc. Works 16, 166.
P. 254. 'Let flames bring rest,' etc., Works 1, 226. 'Ergo

Bibamus,' Works 1, 144. 'Take my life in one big chunk,' etc., Works 3, 305.

P. 257. 'What you say,' etc. Works 3, 315.

CHAPTER XIV

P. 283. The early poem is Unschuld. Works 1, 52.

P. 286. The verses are from 'Childe Harold,' III, 77.

P. 287. 'When we hasten thither,' etc. Works 19, 39; 'How I hate the word,' etc., Works 19, 51.

P. 290. 'Be a man,' etc., Works 4, 162; 'All the wonderful feeling,' etc., Works 19, 12.

P. 295. 'His calling was now clear,' etc. Works 51, 69.

P. 302. 'Why not call it,' etc. Conversations 6, 40.

CHAPTER XV

P. 305. 'He who has had,' etc. Works 37, 207.

P. 306. The citations in order: Letters 2, 120, and 2, 186. Works 37, 215, and 37, 217.

P. 307. 'Especially has the tender,' etc. Works 37, 209; 'What we see in nature,' etc. Works 37, 210.

P. 308. 'What is it that troubles,' etc. Works 51, 122.

P. 311. The citations from the *Propyläen*. Works 47, 11 ff.

P. 313. Literary sansculottism. Works 40, 196 ff.

P. 314. 'Wonderful, excellent Diderot,' etc. Works 45, 256, and 254. 'Goethe, as usual,' etc., Morley's 'Diderot,' Chap. XI.

P. 315. 'When we open our sluices,' etc. Letters 14, 118.

P. 317. For the comments on the Wunderhorn see Works 40, 337 ff. For the review of 'Athenor,' Works 40, 332.

P. 318. Review of Hiller. Works 42 (2), 24.

P. 320. 'I am moved,' etc. Works 42 (2), 59.

P. 321. 'All poetry should be,' etc. Works 41 (2), 225; 'if I were to state,' etc., Works, Hempel ed., 29, 230.

Two important works on Eckermann have appeared since Professor Thomas wrote: J. Petersen, 'Die Entstehung der Eckermannschen Gespräche und ihre Glaubwürdigkeit,' 2nd ed., 1925 (good discussion of the question of Eckermann's reliability), and H. H. Houben, 'J. P. Eckermann. Sein Leben für Goethe,' 2nd ed., 1925 (uses the newly discovered diary of Eckermann; to be consulted in connection with Petersen's work; more favorable to Eckermann than Petersen).

CHAPTER XVI

For a carefully selected bibliography of 'Faust,' see Thomas's (third) edition of Part I, Appendix I.

P. 326. 'I caught each lure,' etc. 'Faust,' ll. 11434 ff.

P. 328. The citation from Sophocles is from Jebb's translation of the 'Oedipus at Colonus,' ll. 1225 ff.

P. 350. 'So let him travel,' etc. 'Faust,' ll. 11449 ff.

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